Print, power and personhood: Newspapers and ethnic identity in East Siberia

This PhD dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Eleanor Katherine Peers, King's College, December 2008.

Contents

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration, except where specifically indicated in the text. Its content does not exceed 80,000 words, the length stipulated by the Degree Committee at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences.

Abstract

This PhD research investigates the relevance of non-Russian Siberian culture and identity both for the state institutions in the regions concerned, and for the Russian Federation's central government. As the first chapter describes, Soviet-era policy towards the Soviet Union's non-Russian peoples brought about a massive cultural change, in the process generating a new awareness of non-Russian ethnic identity. Current ethnographic and sociological research on the former Soviet Union indicates that this awareness continues to develop, while remaining subject to politically motivated attempts at interference. Politicians, academics and journalists have pointed out the capacity of strong ethnic identities to hinder a popular identification with a multi-ethnic federal state, even as other commentators have accused politicians of deliberately encouraging personal ethnic affiliations. The interaction between political propaganda and personal perception within the changing awareness of ethnic identity in the Russian Federation has not yet been clarified, and neither has its significance for post-Soviet Russia's state-building project.

The introductory chapter explains the comparison of two Siberian non-Russian peoples, the Buryat and Sakha, and their respective territorial administrations, the Republics of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), which is intended to isolate general trends in the development of non-Russian ethnicity. This comparison is based on the assumption that culture itself is a network of collectively held ideas that determines social practice, as it changes in tandem with the course of events. The perceptions of non-Russian identity that appeared over the Soviet period are thus understood to arise from changes in the collective understanding of cultural difference. Hence, this study identifies and

then compares contemporary formulations of the Soviet-era terms connected to cultural difference in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia).

The research method is a combined content and discourse analysis of regional newspapers. Both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) contain self-sufficient newspaper markets, producing a flow of discourse determined both by the needs of their local populations, and their regional political establishments. The discursive practices in these Republics' newspapers therefore reflect both popular attitudes, and those that underlie political strategies. Simultaneously quantifying and interpreting the ideas connected to Soviet-era notions of 'ethnicity' in these Republics' mainstream newspapers shows how journalists and political publicists try to use their audiences' 'ethnic' affiliations, in addition to the way they perceive their audiences to understand and value these concepts.

The core material in this thesis consists of two chapters on each Republic, describing their respective regional newspapers, and the discussion of Buryat and Sakha ethnicity these newspapers produced. As the concluding chapter describes, the newspaper material revealed that the current development of Buryat and Sakha culture and identity is integrated into the development of their respective republican administrations. The newspaper discourse as a whole shows how rapid demographic change and inefficient governance poses challenges for both politicians and individual citizens – leading regional- and federal-level administrations to mask their inadequacies through appealing to personal ethnic identity, and their subject populations to elevate their ethnic affiliation into a quasi-religious commitment.

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Note on translation and transliteration

All the translations from Russian to English are my own. The Sakha-language newspapers were translated from Sakha to Russian in Yakutsk; I then translated the necessary quotations into English. I have transliterated sounded Russian hard vowels into English using y, as opposed to i. All the foreign words in italics are Russian, unless they are shown to be Buryat or Sakha.

The Russian word for Sakha is *yakut*, and hence the Sakha Soviet Autonomous Republic was named Yakutia. I have however used the official name of the post-Soviet republican state, Sakha (Yakutia), throughout the dissertation. The Sakha generally use the word *yakut* when speaking Russian, however they sometimes refer to themselves in Russian as *sakha*. I have followed the author's usage when translating Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers.

Preface

In Russia August is the month for explosive events. August 2008 was no exception: the world was baffled by the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's decision to invade the disputed region of South Ossetia on its border with Russia, despite its vast and powerful neighbour's explicit support of the Ossetian independence movement. Equally startling to the outside world was the scale of Russia's response. Not content with forcing the Georgian army into a retreat from South Ossetia, the Russian forces bombed towns well within Georgia's territory. The two governments showered each other with the kind of invective that might preclude their ever establishing a working relationship, each accusing the other of ethnic cleansing.

Neither country had followed strategies the world's dominant nations and international organisations could understand. What was Saakashvili hoping to achieve by attacking South Ossetia? Why had Russia forfeited an easy relationship with the international community by humiliating Georgia so aggressively and openly? Why were Ossetian and Abkhaz nationalists so ready to take up a separatist movement, when full autonomy would bring them only the enormous challenge of establishing nation-states in multi-ethnic territories with no infrastructures? Events were following a logic unfamiliar to the West. The necessity of understanding this logic grows ever more apparent, as the world's need for the former Soviet Union's natural resources increases. The international community has to learn to do business with peoples and

governments previously indistinguishable within the Soviet Union's melting pot.

It was clear, however, that ethnic identity and national pride had a major role in the August 2008 conflict. The two governments were attempting to manipulate strong national affiliations for their own purposes, while simultaneously acting under their influence. Saakashvili claimed that failing to respond to Russia's earlier provocations would have caused "any Georgian government" to fail, hinting that his attack was motivated by his population's national pride (*The Economist*, 16–22 August 2008). The Georgian population's public demonstration of defiance against Russia on August 12 seems to bear out his comment, revealing the depth of their determination to retain their national integrity, even as the Russian tanks were rolling into Georgia (*The Economist*, 16–22 August, 2008). The Russian government, meanwhile, has been fuelling Abkhaz and Ossetian nationalist aspirations throughout the 1990s – despite its long and costly struggle with the nationalist movements in nearby Chechnya. Both governments simultaneously condemned what they claimed to be their opponents' chauvinist nationalism, citing it as justification for their aggression.

I first encountered the strong and yet contradictory significance of post-Soviet ethnic identity while living in Saint Petersburg in early 2000. My hosts regarded themselves as a typical Soviet international family: the husband was western Ukrainian, the wife Tatar, and they lived in Russia's historic 'window on Europe'. They had had their son blessed at both a Catholic Church and a Mosque, Tatars being traditionally Muslim. And yet a terrible argument erupted when the husband's Ukrainian father came to stay: his Tartar daughter-in-law, irritable after a month spent sharing a room with her husband, son and father-in-

law, called Ukrainian a dirty language. She immediately repented and, weeping, begged his forgiveness – but the elderly Ukrainian couldn't bring himself to pardon her, even though he felt such pity for her distress that he also was in tears.

More experience of the intense emotions that can be aroused by ethnic identities in Russia came while I was researching for my M. A. dissertation, on the newspaper coverage of the 2002 hostage siege at a Moscow theatre. A particularly striking example was an article published in the well-known broadsheet *Izvestiya*, claiming that the Chechen people, as an inherently vicious mountain race, were "the dragon's teeth" in the Russian Federation (*Izvestiya*, November 13, 2002: p. 5). I was surprised that such an overtly racist article could be deemed publishable by a leading newspaper in a multi-national country, whose constitution defined four state religions – Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism – in acknowledgement of its ethnic diversity.

The power of ethnic identity to influence political change in the former Soviet Union was demonstrated at the beginning of the 1990s, when numerous non-Russian Soviet Republics made declarations of national autonomy, asserting the right of their titular ethnic groups to independence from what they implied was an imperialist central government. As has become clear with hindsight, the acquisition of power and resources was a strong motivation for many of these nationalists; however, they still regarded ethnic nationalism as a potent source of public self-legitimisation. They were using a strong popular attachment to ethnic identity to attain their political ends, just as the Russian and Georgian governments did in 2008.

The Russian Federation now exists as a patchwork of regional administrative units, many of which are described as non-Russian Republics – such as the Siberian Republics of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), home to the Buryat and Sakha peoples. Many of the natural resources that have been powering the Russian Federation's recent economic success are situated in Republics with mixed-race governments. These Republics have their own flags, hymns and Presidents; they provide grounds for the aspirations of their titular non-Russian populations towards national independence, even though most of them are financially dependent on Moscow. Vladimir Putin's administration has made considerable efforts to reduce the power of the Russian Federation's regions, no doubt because of their capacity to threaten Russia's central government. Personal ethnic identity in the Russian Federation remains a political issue.

So how is ethnic identity understood in the Russian Federation? What gives it such tremendous personal importance? And how does political policy interact with popular ethnic identity? I decided to address these questions by comparing notions of non-Russian ethnic identity and their political significance in two non-Russian Republics, Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia). I had several reasons for selecting these Republics: the Buryat and Sakha peoples are comparable, being the two largest non-Russian groups in Siberia, and descended from livestock-herding, non-indigenous animist cultures. However, they are also at either end of the major scales of variation in Siberia: the Buryat are a Mongol people, while the Sakha are Turkic; Buryatia's territory has few natural resources, while Sakha (Yakutia)'s is extremely rich. In consequence, Buryatia's republican administration has a subservient relationship with the federal

government, while Sakha (Yakutia)'s has proved to be a much more determined negotiator; the late Soviet Buryat nationalist movement quickly petered out, while Sakha nationalist organisations continue to exist.

My pilot research trip to the two Republics in December 2004 confirmed my decision. I had enough contact with individual Buryat and Sakha to understand that they are two distinct peoples, living in different countries – and the effects of Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural wealth were immediately obvious. And yet the subtle influence of post-Soviet ethnic identity made itself felt in both contexts, whether as a festival of singing at Buryatia's State Opera House, or as a remark from a journalist about the hidden tensions between ethnic groups.

Both Republics are large, remote and under-populated.[1] The Republic of Buryatia is situated along the east side of Lake Baikal in south-east Siberia, occupying a territory of 351,300 square kilometres – over twice the size of England. According to the 2002 census, Buryatia is populated by 981,200 people, of whom 272,900 (27.8 per cent) are Buryat and 665,500 (67.8 per cent) are Russian (www.perepis2002.ru). 39.1 per cent of Buryatia's population lives in its capital, Ulan Ude (Abayeva et al, 2004: p. 3). Sakha (Yakutia) currently occupies one fifth of the Russian Federation's territory, stretching north from Buryatia and Irkutsk *Oblast'* to the Arctic Ocean (Argounova, 2001: p. 19). It is around the size of the Indian subcontinent (3,103,200 square kilometres), with a population (according to the 2002 census) of 949,300, of which 432,300 (45.5 per cent) are Sakha, and 390,700 (41.2 per cent) are Russian (Vitebsky, 1990: p. 304; www.perepis2002.ru). Around 23 per cent of the Sakha (Yakutia)'s population lives in its capital, Yakutsk (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 130).

[1] Maps of these Republics and of the Russian Federation can be found in Appendix One.

Creating a product that attracts a paying audience is the overriding concern of every commercially owned media organ, whether or not external interest groups are also using it to promote their own messages. My experience of journalism in the UK, along with my MA dissertation research, showed me how mass communicators try to reproduce the opinions and mindsets of their target audiences in order to sell their media products. The first thing I was told as a trainee journalist was to avoid trying to inform the public for its own sake. Instead, I was to make my articles conform to the product a given newspaper or magazine was selling, which was tailored to the probable interests and desires of a specific group of people. The contrasts I found between Russian and British newspaper articles provided further proof of an intimate connection between media discourse and popular understanding. It was clear that similar words, like 'liberalism' (*liberalizm*), 'Islam' (*Islam*) or 'democracy' (*demokratiya*), carried completely different connotations for Russian audiences, and were being used by writers for very different purposes. The Russian journalists were adapting their communication to their audiences' distinct understanding of the world, as do British journalists. The development of commercial journalism in post-Soviet Russia has created the possibility of examining popular belief through the analysis of mass media discourse.

The pilot research trip confirmed my intention to use regionally produced newspapers as my main source. I found that the newspaper markets in both Republics contained newspapers sponsored by the regional governments, in addition to a variety of newspapers whose primary function was to make a profit. The government-owned newspapers were intended to publicise the

government's point of view, as their editors acknowledged. Regional newspapers in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) provided the opportunity to compare ideas about ethnic identity that had their origins in political policy, with the ideas produced in order to attract a target audience.

I decided to deconstruct the discourse produced by samples of the most prominent newspapers in each Republic, both quantifying and interpreting the ideas they contained. This exercise would result in descriptions of each newspaper's treatment of ethnic identity, from which the likely developments in audience perception or political policy could be inferred. The investigation would focus on learning more about non-Russian ethnicity through newspaper discourse, rather than addressing the debates occurring within a specific discipline. It would aim to benefit researchers of the Russian Federation, whether they are political scientists, sociologists or anthropologists.

The research trips also confirmed my suspicion that I had undertaken an ambitious project. As it transpired, collecting newspaper material in Siberia is a complex and demanding task, riddled with unforeseeable difficulties – whether posed by uncooperative visa registration bureaus, power cuts or broken photocopiers. The supplementary audience research I had intended to carry out proved to be more limited than I had hoped, since the people I met were simply too nervous to be candid about their experience of ethnic identity to a foreigner. Again, the phenomenon of a politicised and yet hugely personally significant ethnic identity made itself felt: my status as an English woman (*anglichanka*) made me appear to be both a supercilious representative of one of the world's 'civilised' races, and a potential spy. Meanwhile the study of newspaper production and use in each region is minimal, and considerably hampered by the

unwillingness of newspaper and advertising organisations to publish their research.

Two notable exceptions however were the editor of the newspaper *Yakutia* and Lyudmilla Badmayeva at the Institute of Mongolian and Buddhist Studies in Ulan Ude, who were extremely generous in sharing their research. These were among the many people and organisations that made this investigation possible. I am truly grateful to all of them, whether or not I have been able to include their names in the limited space I have here. Several academics and journalists in European Russia, Siberia, the UK and America have been equally generous with their time and resources, principally Anatoliy Alekseyev, Darima Amogolonova, Tatiana Argounova, John Barber, William Burgwinkle, Vladimir Dyatlov, Caroline Humphrey, David Lehmann, Tatiana Skrynnikova, Piers Vitebsky, Irina Yelayeva, and the members of the Magic Circle at the Scott Polar Research Institute. King's College and Cambridge University helped to finance my research trip, while the Faculty of Journalism at Irkutsk State University provided the essential visa invitation. I am grateful to Yevgeniya Matyukova at Irkutsk State University and her colleagues at Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) State Universities for enabling me to be registered legally in Irkutsk, Ulan Ude and Yakutsk, and to the students and professionals in Yakutsk who translated Sakha-language newspapers into Russian. I would also like to thank the politicians, journalists and nationalist activists who granted me interviews.

I could not have managed without the kindness and support of many friends in Siberia, Europe and America, whether they were welcoming an unknown foreigner into their homes and lives, or easing the process of writing

up through their companionship and advice. I am particularly grateful to Anya and her family, Kirsten, Simon Barrington-Ward, Tina Burrett, Katrin Graber, Mette High, the Mikhailov family, Ayesha Nathoo, Tatiyana and Zhenya Prodopopovy, Madeleine Reeves, Alice Russell, Olga, Anastasiya and Sayan Ul'turgaschevy, Elana Wilson, and the Zhimbiyev family. My supervisor David Lane has played a crucial role in enabling this project, and I am thankful for his time, energy and advice. This dissertation would not have been written without the enormous help – material, emotional and intellectual – I received from my immediate and extended family.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother, Rosamond Peers, whose insight, curiosity, humour and strength have always been my inspiration.

Chapter One

Introduction: The development of non-Russian ethnic identity in the Russian Federation

Introduction:

Benedict Anderson describes nationalism as the "expression of a radically changed form of consciousness" (Anderson, 1991: p. xiv). This change came about through the simultaneous growth of the capitalist economy and the production of print media, and the techniques of government employed by the Western European colonialist states during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This thesis describes a similar change in consciousness among the Buryat and Sakha peoples of East Siberia, seen through the medium of regional newspaper discourse: the political strategies of succeeding Soviet and post-Soviet administrations have combined with rapid social change to turn Buryat and Sakha ethnic identity into religion.

The cultural diversity of Russia's population first posed a serious challenge to its central government in the early 1920s, in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution and the Civil War. The Bolshevik party's state-building project required them to convert Russia's entire population, irrespective of class, religion or culture, to the Marxist-Leninist values that justified their acquisition of power. By the 1980s the Soviet state had apparently succeeded in integrating

the non-Russian peoples on its territory into a dominant Soviet outlook, having created a series of non-Russian autonomous Republics and Regions (*Okrugi*) – such as the Republics and *Okrugi* populated by the Sakha and Buryat. The variations in cultural and religious heritage existing within these regions seemingly did not prevent their populations from sharing the attitudes, aspirations and values that corresponded with their common Soviet way of life. However, Mikhail Gorbachev's initiation of the *perestroika* (rebuilding) and *glasnost'* (openness) policies in 1985, which encouraged the constructive criticism of the Soviet government, was to generate a range of non-Russian nationalist movements and attempts at cultural revival. These groups joined with the other dissident movements, to voice criticisms that began to undermine the Soviet Union's capacity to legitimise itself publicly. Non-Russian nationalist movements accused the Soviet government of having violated their nations' right to independence at various points over the twentieth century, for example during the Stalinist repressions. These movements demonstrated the existence of non-Russian affiliations that superseded a personal loyalty to the Soviet state, even though non-Russian cultural practice – in lifestyle, religion and language – had been severely reduced.

The Soviet Union could no longer exist under the terms that provided its self-justification – i.e., as a socialist union of Soviet republics – when the titular non-Russian parts of this union began to make declarations of independence, as the Buryat and Sakha Republics did in 1990. Such declarations facilitated Boris Yeltsin's agreement with the Presidents of Ukraine and Byelorussia in December 1991, which reformed the Soviet Union as a Commonwealth of Independent States, and in doing so effectively broke up the Soviet state. One of these newly

independent states was the Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics (RSFSR), shortly to become the Russian Federation, which consisted of a hierarchy of regional administrative units, with varying degrees of autonomy. Territories without titular ethnic groups, the *Oblasti* and *Kraya*, co-existed with non-Russian republican administrations that had their own Presidents, legislative organs, flags, hymns, and official non-Russian languages – although in most cases extensive Soviet immigration and industrialisation programmes had created Russian-dominated populations. Russians make up by far the largest ethnic group in the Russian Federation: according to the 2002 census, 79.8 per cent of the Russian Federation's population is Russian (www.perepis2002.ru). However, by the end of the Soviet period over half of the Russian Federation's territory had been allotted to formally non-Russian regional administrations (Kolstø, 2000: p. 195).

Yeltsin's conflicts with the Russian Federation's legislative organs during the early 1990s led him to grant increased autonomy to several Republics, in order to gain the support of their leading politicians. The level of a specific region's autonomy depended on the capacity of its leaders to bargain with the federal government, which could be greatly enhanced by the presence of valuable natural resources in the region's territory. The opportunities the Yeltsin administration created for the non-Russian Republics had the potential considerably to threaten the federal government's stability, since it cannot afford to lose control of the lucrative natural resources they contain. Siberia in particular has been the focus of conflicts over natural resources: it contains 79 per cent of Russia's oil reserves, 85 per cent of its natural gas, 91 per cent of

coal, 76 per cent of gold, and over 90 per cent of diamonds (Castells and Kiselyova, 2000: p. 188).

Fourteen of the twenty-eight regional administrations that constituted Siberia's government at the end of the twentieth century were non-Russian Republics or *Okrugi*, taking up by far the largest and richest part of Siberia's territory, as the map in Appendix One shows. These governments increase the potential for non-Russian identities to be translated into political or social movements that interfere with the Russian Federation's state building, or even under the right circumstances to undermine the federal state, as they undermined the Soviet Union. They provide an institutional mechanism for non-Russian nationalist attempts to influence federal government policy, while acting as a territorial focus for non-Russian identities that could override a personal affiliation with the federal state. The Slavic leaders of non-Russian titular Republics have also used non-Russian nationalist claims to justify their demands for greater control over their regions' natural resources, even when their subject populations are heavily Russian-dominated.

Vladimir Putin's administration took steps to reduce the threat that the non-Russian regions presented to the federal government's stability, by attempting to create a vertical power structure headed by the federal government, rather than a loose federation of semi-autonomous regions. The Putin administration's efforts can be regarded as successful in many respects. The federal government is now able directly to impose its power over regional governments: it has the capacity to veto the choice of regional Governors or Presidents, and can in some cases merge non-Russian regions with their neighbouring Russian *Oblasti* or *Kraya*, removing their governments and

legislation (for example, the Buryat *Okrugi*, Ust-Ordinsk and Aga, have been unified with their surrounding *Oblasti*, Irkutsk and Chita respectively). The non-Russian regions are no longer in a position to repeat the assertions of independence they made during the early 1990s.

However, the federal government can still face attempts from non-Russian groups or governments to contravene its interests. For example, the proposal to merge the Republic of Adegeya with its surrounding regions in 2006 was met with such determined resistance from Adegeyan interest groups that it was dropped, even though the Adegeyans are in the minority; in Tatarstan, one of the most assertive non-Russian Republics, the President has continued publicly to advocate a structure for the Russian state that would allow the regions considerable autonomy. The conflict among the Caucasian peoples and the Federal Security Services (*Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti*, or *FSB*) continues to haunt Chechnya, Ingushetiya and Daghestan.

The current federal administration faces the same imperative to generate a popular commitment to its state building project as the early Soviet government, in the aftermath of the rapid transformations in state and society during the 1990s. The Russian Federation was constituted as a modern mass polity, and therefore has to ensure a level of popular co-operation in maintaining its governing institutions, if they are not to fail. Non-Russian identities are one of the many potential barriers to the development of individual feelings of loyalty towards the contemporary Russian state and its government institutions, even among the non-Russian populations who do not manifest antagonism towards a powerful federal administration, or a strong sense of cultural distinction.

This dissertation aims to understand the nature of the relationship between the perceptions of non-Russian identity held by non-Russian groups, and the development of the Russian state. As this chapter describes, it seeks to identify the continuing development of the non-Russian identities that stimulated the non-Russian nationalist movements of the 1990s, by examining the ideas connected to perceptions of non-Russian identity among two Siberian non-Russian groups, the Buryat and Sakha.

The research project has been formulated around the hypothesis that the cultural development engendered by Soviet policy and ideology has had a strong influence on current non-Russian perceptions of identity. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that culture itself consists of developing networks of communally held ideas; Chapter Two describes this theoretical understanding of culture in detail. The first section of this chapter presents a brief account of the Soviet government's policy towards non-Russian peoples, and of the changes it stimulated in the popular perception of non-Russian ethnic identity. The second part of Section One discusses the problem of contemporary non-Russian identity, clarifying the way it is addressed by this investigation's analysis of print media. Section Two introduces the Buryat and Sakha themselves, along with their Republics, Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), while the conclusion presents a summary of this dissertation's chapters.

Section 1.1: Non-Russian identity in the Russian Federation

Section 1.1.1: Soviet nationalities policy and ideology

The discussion of the Soviet Union's nationalities policy presented here is based on a variety of sources. These consist of histories of the policies themselves, and their effects (Slezkine, 1994; 2000; Hirsch, 2005; Martin, 2000; Vihavainen, 2000; Shanin, 1989); ethnographic studies of non-Russian peoples, which reveal the influence Soviet nationalities policy has had over these communities' lives (Humphrey, 1998; 2002; Vitebsky, 2005; Anderson, 2000; Grant, 1995; Argounova, 2001; Balzer, 1999; Hamayon, 1998; Ventsel, 2005; Crate, 2006); and historical and sociological studies of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), carried out by academics based in these regions (Khamutayev, 2005; Stroganova, 2001; Yakovlev, 2003; Boronova, 2005; Amogolonova, 2005;Yelayeva, 2004). Further evidence comes from my own experience of the lingering effects of Soviet nationalities policy in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia); descriptions of Soviet-era 'ethnos theory' by both its practitioners, and Russian and Western commentators (Bromley, 1974a; 1974b; Bromley and Kozlov, 1989; Tishkov, 1997; 2003; Gellner, 1988, **Ilkhamov, 2006, Skrynnikova, 1999**); in addition to anthropological, historical and sociological literature on other aspects of the Soviet Union (Ledeneva, 1998; Christel Lane, 1981; David Lane, 1981; Yurchak, 2003a; 2006; Volkov, 2000; Service, 2002; 2004; Volkogonov, 1998).

This section describes what all these sources show to be the basic strategy of the Soviet nationalities policy: the modernisation of non-Russian

populations, which involved the promotion of specific forms of non-Russian cultural production, but which essentially worked to homogenise non-Russian cultures and ways of life. Although there were variations in the Soviet nationalities policy during the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s, the aim to modernise non-Russian peoples remained constant. As this account contends, the Soviet nationalities policy was to generate a development in the popular perception of ethnic identity. Individual ethnic affiliations acquired a strong personal significance, while simultaneously remaining a political concern throughout the Soviet era.

Marxist-Leninism developed out of the philosophies that emerged during the European Enlightenment, in that it assumes the possibility of an ideal state for mankind, which can be achieved through the appropriate human endeavour. The Marxist-Leninist account of history entails certain absolute values, despite its atheist and materialist roots. As David Lane describes, Marxist-Leninism is predicated on the assumption that "objective laws of nature which condition the evolution of society" exist (David Lane, 1981: p. 5). It posits a universally applicable pattern of economic development that concludes with the foundation of the communist society. This development can however be accelerated by those with a sufficient knowledge of the laws of social behaviour, and in particular, of political class interests. Communists would have committed themselves so completely to a rational interest in the good of all members of society that any form of social inequality would have disappeared. The positioning of this society at the culmination of a universal economic development implies that every other society, along with its members, can be judged according to their proximity to it. Every social group therefore can be

allocated a place in a hierarchy of social organisations, according to the extent of their development towards communism.

Francine Hirsch's account emphasises that Marxist-Leninism was developed against the backdrop of Europe's age of nationalism, and incorporated contemporary understandings of nationality, ethnicity, and their crucial influence over social activity (Hirsch, 2005: pp. 5, 15, 21–62). However, Teodor Shanin notes that the notions used in Soviet academia to describe cultural difference developed into paradigms that contrasted with the explanations of nationhood and ethnicity prominent in the West, such as those of Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983). The discussion of cultural difference throughout the Soviet period "focused on and gave credence to … ethnic entities of high consistency and political potential, historically formed and changing over time … ethnic particularity was treated as socially real and not as a mystified expression of something else." (Shanin, 1989: p. 412.) This discussion therefore concerned generalised notions of ethnic grouping (*narodnost'*), nation (*natsiya*) or ethnos (*etnos*), all of which refer to ontologically existing communities. The contrasts in mindset and practice between individuals belonging to different *narodnosti*, *natsii* or *etnosy* were understood in terms of the varying characteristics their particular ethnic or national affiliation entailed, rather than according to the specificities of their psychological, historical, economic, demographic or cultural backgrounds.

However, Marxist-Leninism's insistence on the future disappearance of national difference as the world's peoples turned to communism ultimately made it an anti-nationalist ideology. National or ethnic cultural difference could not halt what was seen as the inevitable progress of history, being the 'form'

rather than the 'content' of social distinction, as Lenin remarked (Slezkine, 1994: p. 142). This was to create an ideological contradiction throughout the Soviet period, since it clashed with the constant preoccupation of both state and academic institutions with real and influential *narodnosti*, *etnosy* and *natsii*. The contradiction was to some extent resolved through the Soviet establishment's adherence to historical materialism. 'Ethnicity' and 'nationality' were conceived in terms of their capacity to describe the various stages towards communism: 'ethnicity' referred to the groups, cultures and traditions that had not yet become 'national' (Slezkine, 1994: p. 346; Hirsch, 2005: pp. 43, 314; Bromley, 1989: p. 431).

This evolutionist paradigm allows for the eventual disappearance of ethnicity and nationality into world communism. It was to generate extensive academic work on 'ethnos theory' led by Yulian Bromley during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, which aimed to understand the various 'ethnic processes' leading to the merger (*sliyaniye*) of nations (Bromley 1974a; 1974b; Bromley and Kozlov, 1989; Shanin, 1989; Slezkine, 1994: pp. 345–6).[2] The academic discussion and policy relating to cultural difference naturally varied over the seventy-plus years of Soviet government, however it consistently referred to a hierarchy of objectively existing ethnic or national groups, arranged according to their level of progress. Ernest Gellner asserted in 1988 that, "A Soviet anthropologist is still a man primarily interested in the history of mankind and the evolution of human society" (Gellner, 1988: p. 3). Valery Tishkov states that academics in the Russian Federation continue to regard ethnic and national groups as objective social entities (Tishkov, 1997: p. 1; 2003: p. 10). **The concern some**

[2] Bromley used the word *etnichnost'* for 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic group', rather than *narodnost'*; this is now common practice.

prominent academics continue to express with "nominally and actually functioning ethnicity (*etnichnost'*)" supports his claim (Drobizheva, 1995: p. 1). Some scholars have recently tried to initiate debate over the nature of ethnicity and nationality – such as Tatiana Skrynnikova and Alisher Ilkhamov, both of whom argue for a more constructivist approach (Skrynnikova, 1999; Ilkhamov, 2006).

Contestation over the meaning of *etnichnost'* and *natsional'nost'* is less explicit outside the Russian Federation's academic discourse, but both words refer to a complex, changing and highly charged range of understandings, as the following sections will explain. The Soviet distinction between the two terms remains as an assumption that *natsional'niye* cultures and identities are connected to a titular nation-state, and its political institutions. *Etnichnost'* and *etnichniye* identities and cultures do not automatically refer to nation-states, instead having a closer association with intimate, psychological experience. *Etnichnost'* nonetheless retains a political dimension, from its capacity to be mobilised into political movements by nationalist (*natsionalist*) groups and ideologies. The object of this investigation is to elucidate the mix of political and personal significance in the Russian Federation's contemporary understanding of *etnichnost'*, as section 1.2 describes. I will however be referring to this phenomenon in English as 'ethnicity' throughout the dissertation, in order to keep the implicit and unexamined connotations of the Russian word at a distance. Likewise, the English word 'nationalism' will be used to describe politicised attempts to promote a particular ethnic group or culture. The Russian term *natsionalism* has a problematic history, as this section

describes: it is now widely understood as a pejorative term, similar to the English word 'racism' (Argounova, 2001). Bruce Grant notes that the Soviet discourse on culture has engendered a widespread tendency to "objectify" cultural practice within a specific notion of *kul'tura* (Grant 1995: p. 16). I have based this dissertation on a post-modernist conception of culture, which is set out in Chapter Two.

The Russian Federation's enormous territory is home to a huge variety of races and cultures, in addition to the Slavic peoples who have dominated its historical, political and cultural development over the past five centuries. The decline of the Mongol Empire allowed Russian colonists gradually to push the borders of Tsarist Russia ever further from the European continent, even reaching North America – until at the start of the twentieth century they stood at the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Caucasian mountain ranges and Mongolia to the south, and the Pacific Ocean to the east. The Russian Empire of the nineteenth century encompassed the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, Buddhist or Shamanist Mongolian and Turkic tribes in Southern and Central Siberia, and the Shamanist reindeer-herders and hunter-gatherers indigenous to Northern and Central Asia. Its size and diversity prevented the Tsarist government from making consistent and systematic attempts either to remove the non-Russian peoples, or to impose Russian values and lifestyles, until the late nineteenth century. **The Red Army's victory in the civil war of the 1920s put the Bolshevik Party in charge** of a country deeply divided not only by economic class, but by culture, language and religion.

The presence of non-Russian populations on the former Russian Empire's territories presented the early Soviet government with a particular series of dilemmas. The Bolsheviks had identified themselves before 1917 as anti-colonialist, since they regarded colonialism as a form of capitalist exploitation (Hirsch, 2005: pp. 26–28; David Lane, 1981: pp. 35–43). However, the undesirability of giving up valuable territories to the indigenous non-Russian populations became obvious once the Bolsheviks had attained power. Their pre-revolutionary calls for universal national self-determination also contradicted their avowal of an all-encompassing imperative to build a communist society, which itself would eventually erode the distinctions between the world's nationalities. (Their creation of a communist society would start with the institution of a socialist state, hence the specification of the Soviet states as Socialist Republics.) The early Soviet government had to change its populations' worldviews, in order firstly to win their sympathy for the Marxist-Leninist endeavour that legitimised the Soviet accession to power, and secondly to bring the project itself to fruition. The Russian Empire's non-Russian populations lived according to a wide range of Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and Shamanist traditions, and there was no reason to suppose they would have attempted to construct a communist society, had they been granted national self-determination – in common, it has to be said, with the large proportion of the Russian population who also had no knowledge of Marxist-Leninism (Slezkine, 2000: pp. 319, 325).

The historical materialist elements in Marxist-Leninist theory led the Bolsheviks to conceive the problem posed by the Russian Empire's cultural variation as a difference in its population's levels of social development. The

individuals and groups apparently inhibited by their culture and religious tradition from sympathising with the Soviet mission were categorised as ‘backward’ (Slezkine, 1994: p. 144). The Soviet government believed it had to ‘modernise’ its ‘undeveloped’ subjects, removing the attitudes that hindered their ‘progress’, while inculcating the values, practices and institutions that would enable their transition to communism. As Stalin put it at the Tenth Party Conference in 1921, “‘the essence of the nationality question in the USSR consists of the need to eliminate the backwardness (economic, political and cultural) that the nationalities have inherited from the past, to allow the backward peoples to catch up with central Russia’” (Slezkine, 1994: p. 144). However, it had to accomplish this change without appearing to be a newer incarnation of the pre-revolutionary colonists and missionaries it condemned as ‘exploitative’. The task was complicated by the huge variety of culture, religion and tradition which had to be subsumed into Marxist-Leninism, and the central government’s poor knowledge of the Soviet Empire’s peoples and their territories. As Slezkine describes, the Siberian Office’s three employees would urge the Commissariat of Nationalities in 1922 to “know where things are located, and not confuse Azerbaijan with Siberia, and Siberia with the Ukraine.” (Slezkine, 1994: p. 140.)

Hirsch and Slezkine show that the Bolsheviks co-opted academic ethnographers throughout the 1920s and 30s into an attempt to produce an exhaustive classification of all the ethnic groups living on their territory, involving a census of the entire population (Slezkine, 1994; Hirsch, 2005). As Hirsch notes, the Soviet government used a similar ‘cultural technology’ to establish its power as the West European colonialist empires, described by

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*; this similarity displays the Soviet state's inherently modern character (Hirsch, 2005: p. 13; Anderson, 1991: pp. 163–186). This classification was regarded as the first stage of a conscious intervention into the historical process, which would convert Russia's 'ethnic groups' into the 'nations' that would emerge into the communist society. The census would re-form the Russian Empire's chaotic mix of cultures into a series of ethnic groups, each occupying a territory that would become its national homeland, while simultaneously defining each ethnic group's stage of development. The Soviet state would then endow each ethnic group and its territory with the state institutions that befitted a nationality – including modern industrial, cultural and educational establishments. It would train its non-Russian populations to run these institutions, building up Soviet 'nationalities' from their roots in the ethnic groups of pre-Soviet Russia. The Soviet name for this policy – *korenizatsiya* – expresses their emphasis on 'rooting' modernity into the lives of its non-Russian populations, being derived from the word *koren',* or root. This re-education process would necessarily involve removing the traditional institutions, attitudes and practices that hindered the full adoption of a modernised lifestyle and outlook, along with the individuals who maintained them.

Soviet ideological discourse described its modernisation as the 'liberation' of the non-Russian peoples from Tsarist colonisation, which had prevented them from reaching their full potential – thereby distinguishing the benevolent Soviet policy from exploitative capitalist colonisation, in an attempt to gain non-Russian support (Martin, 2000: p. 353; Hirsch, 2005: p. 14; Vihavainen, 2000: p. 80). The Soviet Union was apparently to exist as a

'friendship of the peoples' (*druzhba narodov*), each living in their own 'autonomous' nation-state – such as the Buryat and Sakha Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics, created in 1923 and 1922 respectively, or the Ust-Orda and Aga Buryat Autonomous *Okrugi*, separated from the main Buryat Republic in 1938. This 'liberation' entailed the public celebration of non-Russian cultures, despite its incongruity with the Soviet government's primary intention to inculcate a Marxist-Leninist worldview, and in doing so to eliminate cultural difference.

The contradiction was resolved at an ideological level through the Soviet government's understanding of cultural production as limited to European art forms, which corresponded to its assumption that the European nation-states are the world's 'developed' societies. The Soviet state claimed to be guiding its non-Russian peoples into bringing out their own 'national' cultural and academic achievements, as part of their modernisation (Slezkine, 2000: p. 335). It would provide non-Russian peoples with the intellectual and material resources they needed to produce their own European-style operas, ballets, literature, art and academia, and to record their traditional dances, songs and oral traditions for future generations – while adapting these dances, songs and oral traditions to fit a Europeanised understanding of 'folk' cultural production, as part of the process.[3] Its education programmes would create an elite class of non-Russian intellectuals, who would direct their populations into their communist future (Slezkine, 1994: p. 157). If successfully carried out, these policies would eventually reduce cultural difference to a selection of traditions in European cultural production, existing among a population that otherwise

[3] The results of this investment into cultural institutions can still be seen in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia). For example, Soviet-built Opera Houses remain in both of these Republics' capitals, where Soviet-era national operas, such as the Buryat epic *Geser*, are still performed.

lived and thought according to Soviet paradigms. The Soviet government likewise removed the contradiction between its claim to be a 'liberating' force, and its mass destruction of religious and cultural institutions, through its use of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Mullahs, priests, shamans, rabbis and lamas were publicly described as the 'oppressive' propagators of 'backward' institutions and practices, who needed to be removed as part of the Soviet 'liberation'.

Establishing the size and condition of Russia's non-Russian populations proved to be more complicated than the policy makers had anticipated, partly because many peoples did not share the Soviet understanding of ethnicity, and therefore could not relate to the ethnic groups the researchers had identified (Slezkine, 1994: p. 160; Hirsch, 2005). The process of identifying Russia's ethnic groups was hampered by a lack of agreement on the characteristics that defined a community as 'ethnic', rather than as arising from another form of social cohesion. The census itself suffered from a variety of local difficulties, particularly in Russia's more remote territories (Slezkine, 1994). Several censuses were taken during the 1920s and 30s, producing ethnographic maps that differed according to the shifts in ideological debate and the circumstances of both researcher and participant. The Soviet policies intended to modernise 'backward' peoples also changed radically over this period, transferring their emphases between the liberation of national cultures, and their enforced modernisation, as the early Soviet state's condition demanded.

The Great Retreat during the mid- to late-1930s brought an end to what Slezkine calls the carnivalesque culture of the preceding years: "The forces of gravity (in both senses) pinned buildings to the ground, peasants to the land, workers to factories, women to men and Soviets to the USSR" (Slezkine, 2000:

p. 332). The increasing consolidation of the Soviet state combined with the Stalinist terror and the threat posed by Nazi Germany to cause a homogenisation of state policy around the central tenets of the Soviet project – including the creation of 'modernised' nationalities. One effect was the decision to issue every individual with a formal state identification that included their nationality: a passport was issued to every Soviet citizen during the early 1930s, which displayed their name, time and place of birth, authorised address and national identity. A fixed national identity was thus assigned to every Soviet citizen at birth, until the nationality definition was removed from the Russian Federation's passports during the 1990s. This identity often had a major influence over individual lives and prospects (Slezkine, 2000: p. 337).

However, disparities remained between the national identities defined by the Soviet ethnographers and government officials, and the group affiliations claimed by individual people. Some non-Russian peoples still have an uncertain attitude towards their official 'national identity' – such as the Buryat, many of whom continue to feel a stronger personal connection with their particular tribe, clan or territorial community than with the Buryat national group.[4]

The generation of a personal relevance for state national identities, along with the fundamental changes in self-perception this requires, was part of the modernising transformation the Soviet government hoped to bring about. The Soviet government's modernising strategy had brought its citizens' self-perception into the remit of state policy, following the all-encompassing logic of Marxist-Leninist theory. The ideological and practical strategies the Bolsheviks used to address the problems created by the Russian Empire's variety of culture

[4] The ethnographies by Aimar Ventsel, Bruce Grant and David Anderson show similarly problematic national identities to exist among the Sakha, Nivkh and Evenk respectively (Ventsel, 2005; Grant, 1995; Anderson, 2000).

and identity had generated a phenomenon called ‘ethnicity’, or ‘nationality’, which incorporated personal identification and evaluation, collective cultural difference, and political action.

Extensive industrialisation programmes that eradicated cultural difference became a major part of the Soviet government’s modernising strategy after the Second World War (Slezkine, 1994: p. 338). The rapid industrialisation of the entire Soviet Union during the 1960s and 70s brought the most radical lifestyle changes to the non-Russian peoples living in the more remote areas, such as the Buryat and Sakha. Increasingly, large proportions of the non-Russian population were encouraged or forced to abandon their traditional ways of life, moving into Russian-style houses and blocks of flats in the newly built villages and towns. Large migrations of Slavic industrial workers to northern and central Asia accompanied the construction of industrial towns, until many non-Russian populations found that within a couple of decades they had become minority groups in their own ‘national’ territories. The Sakha for example witnessed a sharp demographic shift over the twentieth century, as Section Two explains.

The changes in ideological discourse that occurred during the Second World War brought another dimension to the contradiction between the purported ‘modernisation’ and ‘liberation’ of the non-Russian peoples. The need to mobilise the Soviet population against Nazi Germany led Soviet propagandists to emphasise the great historical and cultural tradition of the Russian people, in an attempt to encourage a patriotic attachment to a specifically Russian national identity (Slezkine, 1994: p. 303; Hirsch, 2005: pp. 15, 231–273). The Soviet peoples were asked to fight not only for the sake of the Soviet Union, but also for the Russian state. The relationship between

Russians and non-Russians in these narratives emphasised the Marxist-Leninist notion of a hierarchy of nationalities, determined by their stage of 'development'. The Russian people was portrayed as a highly developed and therefore inherently superior nation, acting as a 'big brother' (*starshiy brat'*) to the other Soviet nations by bringing about their 'development' and 'civilisation'. Slezkine contends that post-war ideological discourse went so far as to describe the Russian people as the 'chosen' advancers of the human condition, so that the history of humanity revolved around that of the Russian people and their state (Slezkine, 1994: p. 304).

The Soviet Union's ideological discourse thus accorded national difference a crucial significance within its account of human progress. It encouraged the non-Russian peoples to seek out and develop their nation's cultural 'assets', within the boundaries set by the Soviet definitions of national difference and cultural production, while vilifying the 'bourgeois nationalists' who expressed opposition towards the Soviet modernisation (Argounova, 2001; Khamutayev, 2005; Yakovlev, 2003).[5] Nationalism (*natsionalizm*) became known as a heinous crime throughout the Soviet Union, and was used to justify the repression of many non-Russians. In practice, *natsionalizm* often referred to a lack of respect for Russian culture, rather than an excessive desire to promote one's own (Slezkine, 2000: p. 336; Yakovlev, 2003: p. 63).

The contradictions within Soviet ideology on the 'national question' added to the emotional pressures Soviet policy could exert on non-Russian citizens. Soviet ideology encouraged them to regard their nationality and its peculiarities as aspects of their personhood and identity, while emphasising their

[5] These authors describe either their personal experience of the punishment meted out to 'bourgeois nationalists', or that of groups known to them.

nations' inferiority to the Russian 'big brothers', the benevolent instigators of the massive changes that were making many pre-Soviet peculiarities increasingly impossible to maintain as the latter half of the twentieth century progressed. The enforced transition from pre-Soviet non-Russian social systems to sedentary[6] European-style farming and industry during the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s was accompanied by widespread cultural, social and economic devastation, varying according to each region's territorial and social specificities. For example, Caroline Humphrey describes the damage Soviet collective farming wrought to Buryatia's thin and fragile soil: by the late-Soviet period imports of hay from Mongolia were needed in order to feed Buryatia's sheep (Humphrey, 1998: p. 454).

Non-Russian citizens had to adapt to radical changes, forcing them to develop new ways of coping with the problems they encountered, and of understanding their place in the world they lived in, reconciling their remaining traditional beliefs with the Soviet ideological narratives they absorbed as they dealt with the upheavals of modernisation and war. The younger generations of non-Russian Soviet citizens found it increasingly difficult to relate to their parents' and grandparents' values and aspirations, creating the potential for profound identity crises. For example, the children from Siberia's indigenous reindeer-herding tribes who had been educated at Soviet boarding schools lacked their parents' knowledge of the traditional practices needed to herd reindeer in an arctic climate, making them unfit for their peoples' traditional way of life (Slezkine, 1994: p. 342; Vitebsky, 2005).

[6] 'Sedentary' here refers to settled agriculture, as opposed to nomadic livestock herding.

However, many of the non-Russians who had had a predominantly Soviet education were deeply grateful to the Soviet government, believing the Soviet nationalities policy had given their nation the institutions and education it needed (Slezkine, 1994; 2000; Yakovlev, 2003; Boronova, 2005; Pesteryov, 2000). They took pride in their national republics' new universities, theatres, art galleries and industries, and in the non-Russian academics, politicians, artists, musicians and engineers who ran them. Elderly Buryat intellectuals for example would emphatically tell me that the Soviets had "given" them their cultural tradition; a leading Sakha intellectual sought to impress upon me that Lenin's greatness lay in his decision to develop the Soviet Union's less advantaged peoples. The corollary to this understanding of events is however a sense that the former generation's mindsets and lifestyles are indeed 'backward', and perhaps also that the national group itself is inferior. The personal discomfort this suspicion would cause was exacerbated in some cases by a difficult relationship between Russian and non-Russian populations. Some non-Russian and Russian communities lived peacefully together in a genuine 'friendship of the peoples', while other non-Russian groups felt their Russian neighbours had the patronising or racist attitudes that might be expected from a people officially designated as the vanguard of human development. Vasiliy Yakovlev for example describes how Russians would pejoratively refer to non-Russian Siberians as 'reindeer' (*oleney*) (Yakovlev, 2003: p. 243).

The pride non-Russians were encouraged to take in their 'modern', European-style intellectuals and artists also led them to value the non-Russian intellectuals who received a European-style education during the end of the Tsarist period as the initiators of their development as modern nations. Several

of these early nationalist intellectuals had assimilated the late nineteenth-century European understanding of nationhood that influenced Marxist-Leninism, which inspired them to develop their peoples' culture and political standing. Most of them died during the repressions, along with the leaders of other non-Russian intellectual traditions, such as the Buddhist reformation movement of the 1920s. The anger some felt about these deaths helped to motivate the late-Soviet non-Russian nationalist movements. For example, many late-Soviet Sakha nationalists complained about the premature deaths and subsequent public excoriation of three Sakha writers, Anempodist Sofronov, Nikolay Neustroyev and Aleksey Kulakovskiy, whom they regarded as having founded the Sakha literary tradition. As a result, criticism of the Soviet regime focused on the Stalinist repressions, instead of its modernisation of their culture and way of life, or a perceived Russian colonisation of their territory. Again, it reflects the unusually intensive exposure to Marxist-Leninism that accompanied the late-Soviet non-Russian nationalist intellectuals' high level of education.

The Soviet government's need to define its intentions, practices, population and state in terms of its purported aim to create humanity's ideal social condition, and the all-encompassing nature of the aim itself, led to a centralised network of institutions and rituals that encouraged the lives of Soviet citizens to revolve around Soviet ideological discourse (Yurchak, 2006; Christel Lane, 1981). These institutions merged Soviet citizens' public and private experience into a constant repetition of Soviet ideological narratives. Humphrey's description of the holidays held for Buryatia's collective farm workers during the 1960s and 70s shows how Soviet institutional practices integrated various dimensions of personal and private life, into a complex ritual

that both demonstrated the existence of a socialist lifestyle, and created opportunities for Soviet norms to be reiterated. Workers' holidays, such as ‘Day of the Pig-keeper’, were instituted by the central Soviet government to demonstrate how every group of workers is and should be valued, as in a truly rational and classless society. All associations in the Soviet Union had an official duty to organise a succession of public speeches, competitions, prize-givings, criticisms and entertainments on the designated holidays belonging to each group of workers in their institution. Humphrey notes that on one of the collective farms she observed only two of the holidays were celebrated – ‘Day of the Shepherd’ and ‘Day of the Machine-Operator’ (Humphrey, 1998: p. 376–377). These workers were the most important to the economic success of this particular farm, suggesting that the farm management used the institution of worker's holidays as a stimulus to production. The Soviet system had thus set up a form of institutionalised relaxation, a means by which Soviet values could be disseminated among the population, and a way for administrators to promote economic success. Political and economic activities were being merged with the encouragement of particular personal aspirations and values, during occasions that were acknowledged to be recreational holidays.

The Soviet ideology on national identity generated its own public rituals, such as the exhibitions of folk dancing that accompanied state holidays. Each of the Soviet Union’s nations developed their own versions of the stylised ‘folk’ dances and songs intended for public display. A succession of different national folk dances would be performed, in order to demonstrate the ‘friendship’ and variety of the Soviet Union’s ‘liberated’ nations. These festivals served to reinforce the officially sanctioned understanding of national difference, of the

apparently harmonious relationship that existed between the Soviet nations, and of the national cultures' specific characteristics and attributes. They were part of the Soviet government's direct intervention into its populations' understanding of themselves, and of the cultural differences they could observe – while also reminding them to maintain an outwardly friendly and respectful attitude towards one another, whatever they might actually feel. I found during my field trips that folk dancing displays are still an important component of public events in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia): different national dances are carefully alternated, even during the celebration of a specific ethnic group's traditional holiday, such as the Buryat *Surkharban*.

Alexei Yurchak's analysis of late-Soviet discursive practice shows that urban Soviet citizens developed complex ways of using ideological discourse for their own purposes, during the decades after the Second World War (Yurchak 2003a; 2006). He argues that they accepted Soviet ideology as an inevitable part of daily life rather than as a creed, while creating their own parallel networks of values and beliefs. However, the centrality of Soviet ideology to Soviet education and practice did change individual value systems. More and more Soviet citizens became co-opted into the Soviet project, blurring the distinction between the architects of Soviet society and their subjects. Individuals working in every sphere of Soviet society had to balance ideology and the needs of daily life, along with personal experiences not covered by Soviet paradigms. This created contradictions within the ideology itself, such as the incompatible calls to modernise and liberate the non-Russian peoples, while also generating a disjuncture between social discourse and private experience

that stimulated Soviet citizens to develop the complex attitudes and discursive strategies Yurchak describes (Yurchak 2003a; 2006).

The Bolshevik attempt to mould reality into their ideology had in fact created a new reality, giving the contentions and beliefs that made up Soviet ideology a life of their own in the unpredictable evolution of individual attitudes and practice. Alena Ledeneva's analysis of the late-Soviet black market (*blat*) provides an example of the developments in practice Soviet policy generated. As she describes, "The Soviet system was not a planned economy. It was meant to be, but those living within its borders found that they had to counteract its over-centralisation and its ideological limitations through intricate schemes of informal exchange, regional and industrial lobbying, and a variety of practices for cheating the system." (Ledeneva, 1998: p. 1.)

Both non-Russians and Russians developed ways of adapting the ideology and policy on nationality into their lives, depending on their specific contexts and concerns, and their levels of exposure to the various ideological discourses. These efforts involved a negotiation of their attitudes towards the profound connection Soviet public discourse made between national identity and personal value. For example, the Soviet promotion of national difference stimulated a strong resentment among late twentieth-century Buryat and Sakha nationalist intellectuals against what they perceived as the underestimation of their respective Buryat and Sakha national traditions, understood according to Soviet paradigms – along with many other groups of Soviet-educated non-Russian intellectuals.

Several ethnographic studies show that non-Russians tended to assimilate Soviet ideology into their specific cultural mindsets, rather than

undergoing a complete transformation in attitude and belief (Slezkine, 1994; Vitebsky, 2005; Humphrey, 1998; 2002; Balzer, 1993; 1995; 1999; Anderson, 2000; Grant, 1995; Stroganova, 2001). For example, Humphrey contends that the Buryat used their traditional shamanic practices to help them come to terms with the contradictions of Soviet life: the cycles of suffering and revenge inherent to Buryat shamanism helped the Buryat articulate and explain the suffering Soviet ideology and discourse would not admit. This led, for example, to the belief that the otters in Lake Baikal harboured the spirits of the 1871 Parisian *Communards*, and could help farm workers fulfil their production plans (Humphrey, 1998: p. 408). Piers Vitebsky, Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer and David Anderson all describe the continuation of pre-Soviet shamanic practices among the reindeer-herding tribes, into the contemporary post-Soviet period (Vitebsky, 2005; Balzer, 1993; 1995; 1999; Anderson, 2000). This created a paradox, since the Soviet nationalities policy had succeeded in creating a new awareness of ethnic or national identity among much of the population. The constant exposure to a radically different set of ideas about ethnicity and nationality created the potential for a personal awareness of a non-Russian ethnic identity to take shape as a set of abstracted ideas, instead of remaining an unquestioned part of daily experience. However, these ideas and their personal significances did not necessarily correspond to the officially sanctioned paradigms. The uncontrollable development of non-Russian perceptions of ethnicity and nationality continued to pose problems for the central Soviet administration, ending in the non-Russian national movements during the 1980s and 90s. It remained the subject of Soviet government policy, while forming an integral part of individual self-perception and identity.

Yurchak's study reveals how the different uses of ideological discourse fundamentally changed the relevance of the ideology itself, to the extent that it was no longer capable of justifying the existence of the Soviet state (Yurchak 2003a; 2006). The difficulty of reconciling the Soviet Union's project with the experiences of its purported authors and beneficiaries increased as time went on, until the project itself disappeared amidst the mass of conflicting intentions, attitudes and strategies its non-fulfilment had produced. The attitudes, identities and motivations that formed around the contradictions within Soviet nationality ideology and policy played their part in the transformation of the Soviet Union (Slezkine, 1994: p. 387; Hirsch, 2005: p. 324; Martin, 2000: p. 355). The non-Russian intellectual nationalism movements collaborated with other dissident organisations to demand greater levels of autonomy for their 'national' republics, following the assertions of independence made by the Soviet states in Eastern Europe. The non-Russian nationalism movements had varying levels of support from their respective non-Russian populations, some of whom were unable to identify with the nationalist intellectual representation of their own nations and cultures, like the Buryat (Khamutayev, 2005; Stroganova, 2001). However, the combination of nationalist demands catalysed Russia's transformation, legitimating Yeltsin's decision to break up the Soviet Union. The late-Soviet nationalist movements revealed the potential for the networks of ideas and values associated with the Soviet ideology on 'nationality' to motivate political action, and, given the right circumstances, to cause political upheaval.

Section 1.1.2: The problem of post-Soviet non-Russian identity

The differing cultures, identities and affiliations associated with the Russian Federation's ethnic groups still have the capacity to hinder the post-Soviet federal government from building up a consistent popular loyalty to the Russian state, just as they hindered the early Soviet government. However, the Soviet nationalities policies have increased the tendency for both politicians and ordinary people to subscribe to the view that differences in culture and mindset, and the problems associated with them, are manifestations of 'national' or 'ethnic' identities with a decisive effect on personal characteristics, aspirations and capabilities. The downside is that the Russian Federation's differing 'national identities' are seen as potentially divisive, particularly when non-Russian nationalist elites try to harness them for their own political or business purposes (Kolstø, 2000: p. 224; Tishkov, 1997: p. 248; 2003: p. 345).

Prominent academics in both Russia and the West have advocated the promotion of a civic identity, attached to the Russian Federal state, which would replace the Soviet civic identity as a unifying alternative to potentially dangerous national identities (Tolz, 1998; Piirainen, 2000; Kolstø, 2000; Petersson, 2001; Solovei, 2003; Tishkov 1997; 2003). This civic identity would have to incorporate collective values, norms and aspirations, in the same way as the Soviet civic identity. Some claim that successive post-Soviet governments have indeed introduced a civic national identity: the Yeltsin administration promoted the concept of a *rossiiskiy*, rather than *russkiy* (ethnic Russian) identity, the adjective *rossiyskiy* being derived from the word *rossiyanin*, meaning a citizen of the Russian Federation. Western and Russian sociologists and political scientists have investigated the real importance of a post-Soviet

civic identity, often as part of an attempt to gauge the extent to which the Russian Federation's formally democratic state institutions have taken root in its society (Tolz, 1998; Piirainen, 2000; Petersson, 2001; Kolstø, 2000; Tishkov 1997).

They use survey data, often in conjunction with the analysis of interviews conducted with samples of ethnic Russians. Their analysis consists of matching their participants' statements about collective identity, the Russian people, and their state against various models of collective affiliation, to see which model best fits their data. This method assumes that perceptions of collective identity can be broadly categorised according to the community to which they are understood to refer – be it defined as a state, a state in tandem with its national group, an ethnic group, or by other collective attributes such as culture. Individual collective identities can therefore be described as specifically 'civic', 'national', 'ethnic' or 'cultural'. The attempt to isolate and define individual collective identities also posits a fundamental distinction between collective identity and its surrounding social context: political and cultural change is understood to generate collective identities, which take on an independent existence as abstracted, generally applicable concepts.

Research by Vera Tolz, Timo Piirainen and Bo Petersson suggests that a pan-ethnic civic identity had little relevance for individual people at the end of the 1990s, despite the federal government's alleged attempts to encourage it. Petersson's analysis casts doubt on the reality of the federal government's efforts to inculcate a civic identity. It reveals that Russia's collective identity is conceived both in public discourse and private perception as a unification against a variety of internal enemies, sometimes identified specifically as ethnic

Caucasians, rather than a positive attachment to a state and its corresponding social project. Petersson's research corroborates that of Ivan Zassourskiy, who claims Vladimir Putin won the 2000 presidential elections by promoting an impression that the Caucasian ethnic groups pose a substantial threat to Russia (Zassourskiy, 2001). Petersson's and Zassourskiy's results indicate that the federal government regards influencing popular perception as an essential task of government, in common with the Soviet government. By emphasising a specific threat from the Caucasian peoples, the federal government reinforces its populations' awareness of ethnic difference, rather than promoting a pan-ethnic state identity that could reduce the relevance generally attached to ethnic identities.

The creators of these government narratives incorporated their perception of popular feelings about ethnic identity into a political project, as did the Soviet government. They assumed that the Russian Federation's population understands ethnic or national difference as highly influential. Their assumptions about their audiences entail a consideration of the Russian Federation's non-Russian ethnic groups: a heightened popular awareness of ethnic difference could not exist in an exclusively Russian population.

The ethnographies of specific non-Russian communities show that the identities that might be termed 'national' in the Russian Federation are dynamic and complex, often interacting with other collective identities in a process of rapid cultural development (Balzer, Petro and Robertson, 2001; Balzer, 1993; 1995; 1999; Anderson, 2000; Grant, 1995; Ventsel, 2005). They are not a set of clearly defined, consistent and uniform affiliations with the Russian Federation's officially acknowledged range of nationalities. **For example,**

Marjorie Balzer describes the kin-related identities that continue to have a profound importance for the Khanty people of western Siberia. These arise from the traditional Khanty belief in reincarnation: individual souls are reincarnated through successive family generations, perpetuating a strong sense of connection with the kin group (Balzer, 1999).

All these ethnographies show that Soviet nationalities ideology and policy have strongly influenced the collective identities among the groups concerned, although this influence has taken very different forms. For example, Bruce Grant's ethnography of the Nivkhi living on Sakhalin Island reveals the extent to which the Nivkhi assimilated the pan-national Soviet identity, so that the collapse of the Soviet state caused multiple identity crises rather than a surge of Nivkhi national pride (Grant, 1995). In contrast, Balzer and Tatiana Argounova show how the selective Soviet-era industrialisation of Sakha (Yakutia) encouraged Sakha populations to regard themselves not only as distinct from ethnic Slavs, but also as exploited by a Russian Soviet state (Balzer, 1993; 1995; Argounova, 2001). David Anderson claims that 'national' identities corresponding to the Soviet model are becoming increasingly important among the Evenki reindeer herders he studied, in tandem with the affiliations individual Evenki have towards their specific reindeer herding collectives (Anderson, 2000).

The massive reductions in obvious cultural difference initiated by Soviet nationalities policy, and exacerbated by post-Soviet economic, cultural and demographic change, complicate individual identifications within non-Russian groups. These shifts in lifestyle and identity can also hinder the development of political non-Russian nationalist movements, as the Buryat case exemplifies.

The Buryat intellectual nationalist movement failed to attain overt popular support during the 1990s, largely because much of the Buryat population could not relate to the pan-Buryat identity and culture that the Buryat nationalist intellectuals promoted (Stroganova, 2001; Khamutayev, 2005; Yelayeva, 2004). This communication gap reflected the Buryat nationalist intellectuals' assimilation of the official Soviet conception of the Buryat and their culture. Rural Buryats tended to identify with their clans or territorial communities, while much of the urban population had become so accustomed to a Russianised lifestyle that they could not associate the nationalist representations of Buryat culture with their own lives. Moreover, the post-Soviet economic collapse in rural Buryatia is stimulating more and more Buryats to move to Buryatia's capital city, Ulan Ude, or to leave Buryatia entirely, and in doing so is **bringing about further changes in Buryat lifestyle and culture** (Randalov, Kharayev and Chukreyev, 2005). These changes are having a contradictory effect on Buryat identity: some Buryats are for the first time beginning to recognise a pan-Buryat identity, while others believe that they are only distinguished from Russians by their Asiatic appearance (Yelayeva, 2004).

Non-Russian nationalist movements are faced with a need to demonstrate their relevance to Russianised non-Russian populations, while the Putin administration's increasingly successful assertion of the central government's power is reducing the possibility for nationalist claims to have genuine political weight. The non-Russian populations are not immediately likely to generate a series of nationalist movements with the capacity to de-stabilise the Russian Federation, as happened during the 1990s. The complexity and variability of non-Russian identities prevents them from forming an

inevitable barrier towards an individual's loyalty to the Russian Federation's central government. Under the right circumstances, however, they can lead to a sense of resentment against the Russian federal state. For example, the recent development of a pan-Buryat identity has been accompanied by some angry discussion about the federal government's centralising policies in Ulan Ude's Internet chatrooms, along with a youth nationalism movement called 'The Association of Young Academics' (*Ob'yedinyeniye Molodykh Uchennykh*).[7] The awareness of 'ethnic' or 'national' identity stimulated by Soviet nationalities policy continues to develop; however, its significance for the Russian Federation's state-building project is not yet entirely understood.

The investigation of the nature of ethnic Russian identities using the sociological methods described above corroborate the impression of complexity and dynamic change produced by the ethnographic research, in addition to that of a strong influence from Soviet nationalities ideology. For example, Tolz concludes that Russian identity is predominantly 'cultural' – i.e., it is understood to consist of a commitment towards Russian culture and values, rather than as referring to an individual's parentage or place of birth (Tolz, 1998: pp.1015–1016). The prevalence of this particular 'cultural identity' does not preclude the existence of influential notions of 'ethnicity', or 'nationality' per se, since its main criterion is a positive relationship with a specific ethnic group's culture – in this case, the Russian ethnic group. Tolz's results therefore present a contradictory impression of the importance perceptions of ethnic difference and identity have for ordinary Russians. 'Cultural' identity appears to prevail over 'ethnic' identity, although the nature of the cultural identity itself reveals a high

[7] www.buryatia.org/modules.php.name=forums; August 30, 2008

awareness of ethnic difference as an abstracted social phenomenon. The contradiction Tolz' results present is resolved when the possible influence of attitudes and beliefs generated during the Soviet period is borne in mind. A people who had grown up under a policy to homogenise different cultures into a dominant Russian worldview could well have a flexible attitude towards the attribution of Russian identity, understanding it to refer to the extent of an individual's Russian acculturation. This attitude could combine the assumption that national difference is ultimately irrelevant within an all-encompassing Soviet project, with the belief in the inherent superiority of Russian culture encouraged by state ideologists since the Second World War.

The complexity of contemporary post-Soviet identities suggests the effort to define them using theoretical models will tend to show a lack of correspondence, rather than a positive understanding of personal affiliation, as is the case with the research on the civic identities of Russian Federation. **These theoretical models also elide the distinction Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper draw between the concepts of identity used in academic analysis, and those incorporated into political and social strategies such as the Soviet nationalities policy (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). As Brubaker and Cooper note, a confusion of the categories used to investigate the relationship between the individual and collective with the notions of identity that underpin ideology can create false assumptions about the ontological reality of identity, and its causal status. The Soviet nationalities policy itself is a good illustration of the difference between the conceptions of identity promoted for specific political or social purposes, and the ways individual subjects interact with their social contexts in reality: as the previous section**

describes, the attempt to create modernised 'national identities' did not have its intended effect. The effort to gauge the quality of democracy in the Russian Federation by quantifying civic identity reiterates the Soviet-era belief in the power of specific identities – formulated by the policy makers and academics themselves – to bring about social and political change.

The ethnographic method is better able to distinguish the nuances within the collective identifications of particular groups – **while a focus on region-specific ideas avoids the danger of positing unnecessary concepts of identity, as Brubaker and Cooper describe. A number of ethnographies have analysed the interaction between Soviet policy and specific non-Russian cultures, often paying particular attention to the cultural shifts engendered by the state transformation over the 1980s and 90s (Balzer, 1999; Anderson, 2000; Grant, 1995; Ventsel, 2005; Humphrey 1998; 2002; Vitebsky 2005; Ssorin-Chaikov, 2003). Most of these studies focus on a single non-Russian people, and include extensive research into this people's pre-Soviet history.**

These ethnographies are investigations into Soviet policy, culture and its effects, and address through this more abstract questions on the nature of the state, indigenous culture, colonialism, tradition, and cultural transformation. For example, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov discusses the importance of institutional failure within the process of maintaining statehood, through a description of the Evenki people's experience of Tsarist and Soviet governance (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2003). Some are especially interested in the capacity of belief and convention to survive historical change through reassimilation into new social and political contexts

(Balzer, 1999; Humphrey, 1998; 2002; Vitebsky 2005). For example, Humphrey explores the changing patterns of individual decision-making and practice existing in provincial Russia during the 1990s (Humphrey, 1998). She notes attitudes and strategies that are rooted in the Soviet system, but which have adapted and now influence post-Soviet economic development. Others are more concerned with the state of contemporary indigenous cultures worldwide; for example, Balzer examines the relevance of the indigenous Siberian experience of Soviet power for the understanding and practice of indigenous politics (Balzer, 1999). This research goes a long way towards explaining the contradictory results produced by the sociological investigation of post-Soviet ethnicity. Its emphasis on detail and personal account shows the complexity of both the enactment of the Soviet nationalities policy, and popular responses – while also revealing a pattern of profound cultural change, stimulated by a conscious political strategy to mould popular self-perception.

However, the detail of this description precludes the possibility of an equal comparison between different non-Russian groups within a single research project, although, as Balzer notes, the entire ethnographies can be compared as case studies (Balzer, 1999: p. 7). The difficulty of performing comparative ethnographies confines the relevance of ethnographic data to more general theories, rather than the workings of contemporary politics. These authors do not directly relate their findings to the work of political scientists and sociologists, which generally concerns the warp and weft of political and social development; this anthropological work does not therefore explore the influence non-Russian ethnicity has on Russia's

politics. A study of the significance of non-Russian cultural identities for the Russian Federation's governance would have to maintain the ethnographic freedom to define key concepts in local terms, while producing data that could establish their relevance to the Russian Federation in particular. **It would also have to compare two or more cases, in order to deduce tendencies occurring throughout the Russian Federation.**

The influence of Soviet-era notions of 'nationality' and 'ethnicity' on the contemporary understanding of cultural difference and collective identity in Russia raise the possibility that these understandings are themselves a continuation of a mass cultural development, initiated by the early Soviet strategy to resolve the problems posed by Russia's non-Russian populations. This investigation into the political relevance of popular perceptions of ethnic or national identity therefore seeks to locate the contemporary formulation of the Soviet-era terms connected to cultural difference, and their function within their surrounding context. It aims to identify common patterns of ideas about cultural difference, by searching for concepts that resemble the basic ideas of Soviet nationalities ideology. **This project resembles Humphrey's investigation of the continuities between the former Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, focusing on a particular aspect of Soviet culture, the understanding of ethnicity. It charts the contemporary stages of the late- and post-Soviet development in non-Russian culture and identity identified by the anthropological literature.**

Soviet ideology describes cultural difference primarily as the variations in practice and attitude that distinguish the world's 'ethnic' groups, while 'national' culture and identity are a more developed version of 'ethnic' culture

and identity; hence ‘ethnicity’ is the phenomenon that ultimately accounts for cultural difference. Investigating the contemporary understanding of ‘ethnicity’, ‘ethnic culture’ and ‘ethnic identity’ within the Russian Federation’s developing complex of collective concerns, aspirations, values and beliefs will provide an insight into its non-Russian cultural identities, and their political significance.

The integration of Soviet ideology into the Soviet Union’s social life and cultural development enabled its representation of cultural difference to acquire significance within a huge variety of social spheres and practices. An individual’s officially designated national identity often had a major effect on their careers and personal relationships. **The Soviet conceptions of ethnicity and nationality were integrated into public discourse in a way similar to the ‘flagging’ of contemporary Western notions of nationhood described by Michael Billig in *Banal Nationalism*: Billig contends that the populations of contemporary nation states are exposed to constant reminders of these ideas, whether through news reports or weather forecasts (Billig, 1995).** The investigation of post-Soviet non-Russian identity as a development of Soviet-era attitudes therefore requires a data set presenting a wide range of themes, while reflecting their importance within daily life. It would also have to combine the quantification of repeated sets of ideas, in order to establish their objective relevance, with the subjective interpretation that could draw out the detail of their content and meaning.

The Russian Federation’s mass media discourse acts both to reproduce and stimulate contemporary cultural development, as Chapter Two explains in detail. Yurchak and Ellen Mickiewicz demonstrate the central role the mass media have played in recent Russian history and culture, showing how their

changing discursive practices undermined Soviet ideology, while creating an all-encompassing 'public sphere' that transmitted these discursive practices to the entire Soviet population (Yurchak, 2003a; 2005; Mickiewicz, 1988). Their research corroborates Benedict Anderson's account of the importance of print media in shaping the self-description and project portrayal of modern nations (Anderson, 1991). **Michael Billig's analysis of the way mass media disseminate the 'common sense' that holds nation states together is accompanied by an extensive literature on mass media discourse and politics, as Chapter Two describes.** The discursive practices performed by newspaper organisations in particular reflect popular attitudes, and those that underlie political strategies – while the repetitive and formulaic nature of their communication creates the possibility of both interpreting and quantifying the ideas it presents. The discourse produced by a mainstream newspaper over a sufficient time period will contain repeated complexes of ideas, which are likely to have a specific relevance for their target audience. **The systematic analysis of a sample of newspaper material will refocus the ethnographic study of the interaction between politics and culture, condensing the more typical analysis of an extended historical period into a direct juxtaposition of authoritative and popular discourse. This in turn enables a comparison between two cases.**

Each non-Russian region contains a self-sufficient print media market, determined largely by the needs of its local population, and their political establishment. Quantifying and interpreting the use of ideas connected to Soviet-era notions of 'ethnicity' within a non-Russian region's mainstream newspaper discourse, and identifying their interaction with other important themes, will

show how the producers of regional newspapers perceive their audiences to understand and value a non-Russian identity, within their immediate context. In doing so, it will indicate the contemporary development of the Soviet-generated awareness of 'ethnic' identity within a given region, and its significance for its local politics. **This project places an emphasis on elucidating hidden, 'common sense' ideologies, in common with Billig's study *Banal Nationalism*, rather than exploring the way collectively understood categories become assimilated into individual self-perception (Hearn, 2007).[8] However, the relationship between the Russian Federation's commercial newspapers and their audiences raises the possibility of inferring the personal significance their discourse has for their readers, as Chapter Two explains.**

The search for new formulations of notions generated within Russia – 'ethnic culture' and 'ethnic identity' – can provide the basis for new models of personal identity for sociologists, which are likely to have a more immediate relevance for the Russian Federation's population. The comparison of two non-Russian 'ethnic' identities, the Buryat and Sakha, within their respective Republics addresses the variation between the Russian Federation's different regional contexts, while creating the possibility of drawing general conclusions about the perception and political significance of non-Russian ethnicity in the Russian Federation as a whole. This comparison will provide the ethnographers who research non-Russian Siberian peoples with an indication of the social phenomena that can be generalised to all non-Russian Siberian populations, while analysing in detail the connection their ethnographies suggest between

[8] Jonathan Hearn investigates the interaction between the 'personal' and 'social' aspects of national identity through a study of English and Scottish bank workers.

personal ethnic identity and political strategy. This investigation also benefits the political scientists who follow the Russian Federation's political institutions, by casting light on a cultural development with the power to influence both political strategy, and public reaction.

Section 1.2: Introduction to Buryat and Sakha culture and history

The question as to whether or not pre-Soviet non-Russian religious and cultural traditions continue to influence contemporary attitudes imposes a need for two relatively similar peoples to be chosen for comparison – otherwise the identification of their 'ethnicity' would risk becoming confused by the variety of attitudes presented by the material as a whole. Although the Buryat and Sakha are distinctive peoples, they share enough historical and cultural characteristics to make them comparable within the context of this research project. They are the two largest indigenous Siberian groups, living on neighbouring territories. Their religious and cultural traditions display a combination of Turkic and Mongolian influences, although the Buryat are generally regarded as 'Mongolian', and the Sakha 'Turkic'. Both are descended from tribes who travelled north into Siberia, displacing but not entirely removing the Tungus populations which originally occupied the area. They were subject to similar processes of Russian colonisation, beginning with the Cossack occupation in the seventeenth century, and continuing into the Soviet period. Their current Republics were officially established through the Buryat and Sakha intellectual nationalism movements of the late 1980s, which caused their republican administrations to adopt republican constitutions in 1994 and 1992 respectively.

Both republican governments consist of an executive organ headed by a President, the *pravitel'stvo*, and a legislative organ made up of elected deputies, known variously by the Buryat term *Khural* in Buryatia, and the Sakha term *Il Tumen* in Sakha (Yakutia). These institutions co-exist with a network of sub-regional and municipal administrations.

In both cases nationalist attempts to gain political autonomy fizzled out over the 1990s, although some nationalist organisations continue to exist. Buryat and Sakha nationalism is still a politically sensitive subject. Nationalist activity itself sometimes took the form of polemic academic studies of Buryat or Sakha history and culture – leading to a wide variation in the available accounts. The Buryat and Sakha nationalist intellectuals do not generally display hatred towards Russians, who are often acknowledged as having an integral role in Buryat and Sakha history. Instead, accusations tend to be directed towards specific Soviet figures, policies and ideologies.

However, the large differences between Buryat and Sakha cultures, histories and territories led to variations in the Soviet policies carried out in each area, and their consequent influences on present-day Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia). This combination of factors has resulted in two interconnected variations, which have a strong relevance for the relative Buryat and Sakha capacities to influence the federal government. As the following paragraphs explain, Sakha (Yakutia) contains extensive natural resources, while Buryatia has few; and Sakha nationalist intellectuals were able to attain popular support, unlike the Buryat.

The difference in size and accessibility between the two Republics has had a considerable influence over the Tsarist and Soviet policies adopted in each

region. Buryatia's capital, Ulan Ude, is on the trans-Siberian railway, however Sakha (Yakutia)'s capital, Yakutsk, is accessible only by air or road. Russian colonisation was ultimately to have a more profound effect on the Buryat than the Sakha, as the high proportion of Russians in Buryatia indicates: significant numbers of Russian immigrants were already moving to Buryatia during the late nineteenth century, creating a large population of Russian settlers that did not exist in Sakha (Yakutia). Slavs made up 11.3 per cent of Sakha (Yakutia)'s population in 1897, which was 82.1 per cent Sakha (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 126). These early Slavic settlers tended to become assimilated into the dominant Sakha culture (Vitebsky, 1990: p. 305). However, only 27.7 percent of the population in the 'Buryat' regions lying West and East of Lake Baikal was Buryat, according to the 1897 census (Abayeva et al, 2004: p. 10).

The Buryat people is made up of several tribes, including for example the Ekhirit and the Khori, who have populated the area west and east of Lake Baikal for about a thousand years. Their exact history and origins are unclear**, and vary considerably from tribe to tribe,** although the Buryat are usually assumed to be a Mongolian people. The Buryat languages are similar to Mongolian, although they contain Turkic and Tungus elements in addition to a Russian influence.

The date when Buryat tribes became distinguishable as a distinct ethnic group among the various peoples living and migrating around Inner Asia is also controversial. This issue has had significant implications for Buryat ethnic nationalism, since the various tribal, area, or lineage related identities continue to hinder the development of a universal Buryat identity, as nationalist intellectuals recognise. Caroline Humphrey suggests that they became a people

when the Russian and Chinese governments established the border between Siberia and Mongolia in 1727 (Stroganova, 2001, p. 29), although tribes continued to migrate north from Mongolia and "become Buryat" (Humphrey, 1998, p. 28).

Tatiana Skrynnikova and Irina Yelayeva both suggest that a genuinely pan-Buryat identity only started acquiring a mass significance after the 'national revival' in the 1990s (Yelayeva, 2004; Skrynnikova, 1999). Skrynnikova's description of the various collectives named in the eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of Buryat-populated regions show how the Buryat case provides a particularly clear example of the Soviet-influenced ethnic identity formation described in section 1.1.1 (Skrynnikova, 1999). The word 'Buryat', or the Buryat-language form 'Buryaad', began to be used over the nineteenth century, and was initially the name for a grouping of tribes (Skrynnikova, 1999: p. 8). Buryat peoples coexisted with other tribes (such as the Olyudoy and Khoridoy) that have since been classed as 'Buryat'. According to Skrynnikova's investigation, there are no references to a 'Buryat people' encompassing all these tribes until the early twentieth century, when the small number of Buryat progressives who had been exposed to European understandings of nationhood began to promote the interests of the Buryat people as a whole. Community meetings only began to take on a "pan-Buryat character" (*obscheburyatskiy kharakter*) after 1917, under the influence of the Marxist-Leninist comprehension of the Russsian Empire's non-Russian peoples (Skrynnikova 1999: p. 15). Even so, Buryat nationalist discussion concerned both the 'Buryat' and 'Buryat-Mongol' peoples

throughout the Soviet period: an attempt was made in the late 1980s by some Buryat nationalist intellectuals to restore Buryatia's original name, the Buryat-Mongol Republic. Yelayeva's study indicates that the 1990s nationalist polemic seems finally to have raised a mass awareness of a pan-Buryat collective, especially among the younger generation. In Ust-Ordynsk 25 per cent in a sample of all ages described themselves as 'Buryat' in 1997, although in 1990 no one had chosen this term (Yelayeva, 2004, p. 579). Just under 19 per cent described themselves as 'Buryat' in Buryatia; most of these were young people (Yelayeva, 2004: p. 577).

By the time the Russians started colonising the region in the middle of the seventeenth century, the Buryat tribes lived as nomadic livestock herders – as opposed to the Tungus tribes, who hunted or herded reindeer. Buddhist missionaries also began to evangelise the hitherto shamanist Buryats from this time. They only succeeded in making Buddhism widespread among the Buryats living east of Lake Baikal, since the western Buryat tribes were exposed to a much heavier Christianising influence from Russian Orthodox missionaries. The Orthodox Church made determined attempts to evangelise eastern Buryats during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, although many eastern Buryat converts reverted to Buddhism in 1905, after the Tsarist government published a manifesto on the freedom of religious beliefs in the Russian Empire.

The origins of the Sakha people are also controversial. As in Buryatia, the discussion and investigation of this subject has often been incorporated into nationalist polemic. The Sakha ethnic group is generally regarded to have a variety of forbears – most importantly, the Turkic tribes that migrated into central Sakha-Yakutia from southern Siberia in the middle ages. These tribes

either became assimilated with or displaced the Tungus and Yukagir peoples that then inhabited the region. The Turkic influence is strong enough for the Sakha to be regarded as a 'Turkic' people, although there are also Mongolian and Tungus elements in Sakha language and culture (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 23). The Sakha were designated by the Tsarist government as 'semi-nomadic' (*polukocheviye*): they spent the winters in wooden houses (*balaghani*, Sakha), moving to summer accommodation for the two to three summer months. They lived mainly by herding horses and cattle, supplemented by hunting and fishing. Some northern Sakha populations also kept reindeer, like the Tungus. Their traditional religion is shamanic, although they were also nominally converted to the Russian Orthodox Church by the Russian colonists. The incoming Russians called the Sakha the Yakut, and hence the Soviet Republic was named the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (YaASSR), or Yakutia. The renaming of Yakutia, as the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), was the Republican government's compromise between the Sakha nationalist and Federal government agendas.

The Soviet nationalities policy described above was applied to both Sakha and Buryat territories and peoples, although it had a much weaker impact on the Sakha. The wide dispersal of the Sakha population over the republic's huge territory caused major problems in implementing Soviet policies, because the necessary infrastructures were unavailable. This in turn made it more difficult for the Soviets to overcome local opposition. For example, the collectivisation of agriculture happened more slowly in Sakha (Yakutia) than in the rest of Russia. Collectivisation was a major component of Stalin's 'modernisation' programme: it required the resettlement of all the Soviet Union's agricultural workers into large, communally owned, industrialised

farms. In 1931 under 30 per cent of Sakha's households had been collectivised, while the average rate for Russia was around 90 per cent (Tichotsky, 2000: p. 81).

The Yakut ASSR's government also showed a greater capacity to alter or ignore federal government policy than that of the Buryat. One example is the refusal of the Sakha education minister to ban Sakha-language schooling in the 1970s. This has had major repercussions on Sakha culture and self-awareness, since the majority of Sakha continue to speak Sakha language, unlike the Buryat. In 1989, only five per cent of Sakha listed Russian as their main language (Balzer, 1995: p. 145), while 38 per cent of the Buryat participating in a study published in 2004 spoke mostly Russian at home (Yelayeva, 2004: p. 582). In contrast to Buryatia, there are several Sakha-language newspapers with mass readerships, such as the government newspaper *Sakha Sire*. The reduced Soviet presence has given the Sakha more opportunity to retain elements of their traditional culture and way of life than the Buryat. Specific Sakha practices do in fact occur in various aspects of daily life. For example, many Sakha still winter their cattle in the traditional Sakha cow-byre (*khoton*, Sakh.), which has distinctive sloping walls and a turf roof. Buryat nomadic pastoralism meanwhile was entirely wiped out by collectivisation. The Sakha have managed to maintain a greater level of cultural specificity, making it easier for them to define themselves as a non-Russian group.

The central Soviet government's awareness of Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources also strongly influenced its policy in the Republic, and the effect this policy had on Sakha perceptions of the Soviet regime. Gold was discovered in Sakha (Yakutia) at the end of the nineteenth century, and began to be mined in

1924; huge diamond deposits were discovered in the 1960s (Argounova, 2001: p. 27). Sakha (Yakutia) currently provides 99 per cent of Russia's diamonds, which in turn constitute 25 per cent of world diamond production (Tichotsky, 2000: p. 1). In both 1998 and 1999, Sakha (Yakutia)'s diamond production was worth 1.5 billion U.S. dollars (Argounova, 2001: p. 181). The Soviet management of the Republic's industrial growth was likely to stimulate Sakha resentment, creating the impression that the central government was exploiting their territory's natural resources, rather than using them to aid their economic development. There was a huge migration of Slavs into the Republic during the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s, who came to develop Yakutia's mining industries: the territory's Russian and Ukrainian populations increased from 215,000 and 12,000 in 1959, to 550,000 and 77,000 respectively in 1989 (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 127). By 1989, the proportion of Sakha in the population had decreased to 33.4 per cent (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 127). (The proportion of Sakha in the Republic's population has however increased to 45.5 per cent in 2002, as the breakdown of Soviet-era institutions and industries has encouraged ethnic Slavs to move back to their home regions.)

The Slavic population tended to settle in the new towns built around the mines, such as Aldan and Neryungri, while the agricultural regions continued to be populated almost exclusively by the Sakha, and the other indigenous peoples. For example, the 1989 census shows Aldan and Neryungri to have been populated by 49,503 and 87,102 Russians respectively, as against 2,505 and 1,520 Sakha (Argounova, 2001: p. 143). Although there has been some population movement since the Soviet period, the Slavic and Sakha populations continue to live in different areas of the Republic. Large numbers of Slavic

industrial workers also came to live in Buryatia, adding, however, to a longstanding Russian presence in the region rather than transforming a non-Russian majority into a minority over a couple of decades.

Industrial salaries in Yakutia were much higher than those of the agricultural workers, since the incoming Slavs were paid extra to compensate for the harsh climate. In 1992, agricultural workers, 87 per cent of whom were Sakha, were paid on average 16 per cent of the salaries received by industrial workers (Balzer, 1995: p. 143). Much more was invested into the new urban infrastructures, so that industrial populations were provided with running water, central heating and other amenities, while the largely Sakha rural communities were left without. Rural Sakha populations in some areas also suffered from the polluting effects of Soviet industrial development (Crate, 2002). The profits made by exploiting Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources were entirely the property of the central Soviet state. The Sakha were more likely to have experienced the Soviet development of the region as straightforward colonisation than the Buryat, and so the idea of reclaiming Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources from the Federal Russian state would have a strong capacity to generate mass support for Sakha nationalism. By contrast, the Buryat nationalists could only aspire to 'unite' the Buryat, thanks both to Buryatia's lack of economic resources, and the absence at the time of a salient pan-Buryat identity. They were also hampered by Buryatia's major post-Soviet economic crises, which distracted the public's attention away from anything other than their material condition (Khamutayev, 2005; Stroganova, 2001).

The vital importance of Sakha (Yakutia)'s diamonds and gold for the Soviet economy created a much better bargaining position for the Sakha

nationalists than was the case for the Buryat nationalist movement. Sakha leaders were able to introduce themselves and their agenda directly into the factions that made up the central Soviet hierarchy. Sakha (Yakutia)'s first President, the moderate Sakha nationalist Mikhail Nikolayev, did in fact collaborate closely with Yeltsin. The Soviet *korenizatsiya* policy in Sakha-Yakutia had created a disproportionately Sakha political elite, although both Russians and Sakha ran the Republic's industries. This made it easier for Nikolayev's moderate version of the Sakha revival to become a central part of the regional government's policy during the 1990s, rather than turning into a peripheral cultural movement within the political mainstream, as happened in Buryatia.

Sakha (Yakutia)'s first administration was successful in retaining some of the profits from the exploitation of Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources. Yeltsin and Nikolayev collaborated in the creation of the ALROSA (*Almazy-Rossii-Sakha*) company in 1992, which controls the Republic's diamond production and sales. This is described as a private joint-stock company; however, its original share ownership was divided between the Federal Government (32 per cent), the Republican Government (32 per cent), and ALROSA's workers (23 per cent) (Tichotsky, 2000: p. 183; Argounova, 2001: p: 174). The income from ALROSA, in addition to Sakha (Yakutia)'s other natural resource companies, generates considerable financial resources for both the state and private individuals. This wealth has given the republican government a capacity to carry out the large-scale Sakha nation-building projects that were impossible for the Buryat nationalists. Their effects can be seen in the results of a poll, carried out in 1997, which suggests a high level of support for Sakha

(Yakutia) to exist as a "sovereign state within the Russian Federation": 78.2 per cent of the Sakha respondents expressed their preference for this variant, compared to 41.8 per cent of Russians (Petrova, 2004: p. 149). In contrast, 9.3 per cent of Sakha and 45.1 per cent of Russians preferred Sakha (Yakutia) to be a republic within the Russian Federation (Petrova, 2004: p. 149). The wealth from Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources also generates more job opportunities in the private sector, so that Sakha-Yakutia's poverty levels are less debilitating than those of Buryatia. More of the Sakha population therefore has the time and energy to take an interest in their ethnic culture. That said, the wealth distribution in Sakha (Yakutia) is very unequal: state and agricultural workers in particular suffer from the low wages they receive, in combination with the high costs of living with Sakha (Yakutia)'s extreme climate and territory. The Republic's infrastructures are breaking down in the absence of Soviet-era funding from the central government, so that the republican government is faced with the yearly problem of how to provide the more remote towns with basic supplies.

Putin's centralising agenda has exerted an influence over Sakha (Yakutia). In 2002 the Russian Vyacheslav Shtyrov replaced Nikolayev as President. Shtyrov would have worked with Nikolayev during the revival and transition periods, since he had previously held the presidency of ALROSA. Since then he has demonstrated enough loyalty to Putin to be recommended for a second presidential term in 2006. The republican government has not prevented the federal government from reasserting control over ALROSA, by increasing its share holding to 50 per cent plus one share – thus giving the federal government the capacity to jeopardise a considerable proportion of the

Republic's income (Argounova, 2007a). The Sakha nationalist movement has also come under pressure, whether exerted by the federal or regional government. For example, eight students were arrested in March 2005, for taking part in a demonstration against the handover of ALROSA's shares to the Russian Federation.

Buryatia's status is currently undermined by its continuing economic dependence on Moscow: although there has been some improvement, Buryatia continues to suffer from one of the worst post-Soviet economic crises in the Russian Federation. Many of Buryatia's industries have collapsed, in addition to its agriculture. The Putin administration appears to be making the most of Buryatia's current economic weakness. Federal news sources report that plans are being made to merge Buryatia itself with Irkutsk and Chita *Oblasti*, after the unification of the Buryat Autonomous *Okrugy* in 2007. However, a pan-Buryat identity has been developing over the 1990s despite the lack of a powerful nationalist movement, **as I have discussed**; **this affiliation creates the possibility for pan-Buryat nationalist movements to occur.**

Conclusion:

This thesis is a study of the cultural development generated by the Soviet Union's nationalities policy, and in particular of the changing notions of non-Russian identity this policy stimulated, and their relevance to contemporary politics. Chapter Two clarifies the theoretical approach to culture, the mass media and their interaction that underlies the choice of methodology. As it explains, the method for this research consists of the content and discourse

analysis of popular newspapers from Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), aiming to locate the formulation and relevance of the ideas they contain that relate to non-Russian identity. These analyses also identify the newspapers' main functions and aims within their republican contexts – since, as Chapter Two describes, the significance of a newspaper's contentions within its surrounding culture can be gauged from the effects its journalists expect them to have on target audiences. Chapters Three and Five describe the newspapers themselves, and their political and social circumstances, in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) respectively – while Chapters Four and Six concern the newspapers' statements on Buryat and Sakha culture and identity.

The two chapters on each Republic show that specific Buryat and Sakha cultures continue to exist – despite the homogenisation of lifestyle initiated by Soviet policies – along with abstracted notions of 'ethnicity' that can be traced back to Soviet nationalities ideology. Both cases reveal a strong potential for their respective non-Russian cultures to generate aspirations and affiliations that contravene the federal government's interests, although in different ways. Chapter Seven draws together the data presented in the preceding four chapters, showing how Buryat and Sakha cultures are undergoing a similar process of rapid cultural development. This cultural development incorporates an interaction between personal perceptions of Buryat and Sakha identity, and politically motivated attempts to manage or manipulate them – revealing that the nature itself of contemporary politics in the Russian Federation accords non-Russian perceptions of identity an integral role in its development as a state.

Chapter Two

Ethnicity, culture and the press in the Republics of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia)

Introduction:

Chapter One explained the prominent role the Soviet ideology on cultural difference had within the massive cultural change generated by government policy during the Soviet era. Soviet nationalities ideology created a distinctive awareness of ethnic or national identity among both Russians and non-Russians, which still has the capacity to influence political decision-making. It should be noted that Soviet-era conceptions of 'ethnicity', 'ethnic culture' and 'ethnic identity' do not necessarily refer to the complex and ambiguous phenomenon that makes it possible to distinguish one community from another. Investigating the contemporary political significance of non-Russian perceptions of 'ethnic identity' includes clarifying the difference between the theory of Soviet-era 'ethnicity', and the reality of culture itself. The first section of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of culture, language and the mass media in the Russian Federation. Its purpose is to explain the understanding of culture that forms the basis of this investigation, and the consequent decision to use the analysis of regional newspapers as the method. It relates the history of Soviet nationalities policy presented in Chapter One to theoretical literature on culture and the mass

media, showing how an analysis of discursive practice in regional mass communication can reveal the networks of ideas that underlie the contemporary perception of non-Russian identity.

The second section of this chapter presents the research method, which combines content and discourse analyses of regional newspapers. The first part describes the regional newspaper markets in the Republics of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), introducing the newspapers selected for analysis as it does so, and clarifying the sampling method. The second part presents the analysis techniques used to identify these newspapers' discursive practices, along with the notions of ethnic culture and identity within them. The method as a whole is derived from a combination of Russian and Western academic literature, and a series of interviews with academics and journalists in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), conducted during a field trip in November and December 2004**; these will be described in detail in section 2.2.1**. A further field trip, from April until October 2005, was needed to obtain the necessary newspaper material, while the experience of daily life in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) enriched the detailed interpretation of their regional newspaper narratives.

Section 2.1: The role of the mass media in cultural development

Section 2.1.1: Culture, language and knowledge

Research into cultural change requires some consideration of the nature of culture itself, in order to develop a method that reflects the interaction between observable practices and attitudes, and the cultural system dictating their

inherent logic. The complexity of this relationship suggests cultures are best investigated by observing the social practices and attitudes that distinguish a particular cultural community, while maintaining the distinction between these phenomena and the culture itself. Clifford Geertz presents a methodological approach that sustains this distinction, by drawing out the ontological and methodological implications of using the term 'culture' to stand for systems of signification and understanding within societies:

> The concept of culture I espouse … is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical. (Geertz, 2000: p. 5.)

This model implies that culture is contiguous with the practices occurring within a given society, since these practices would not exist without a consensual understanding as to what they mean. However, social hierarchies and practices are taken to exist separately from the culture itself, revealing aspects of it when they are 'read' by the researcher:

> Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification … and determining their social ground and import. … Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalised graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour. (Geertz, 2000: pp. 9–10.)

The ‘transient samples of shaped behaviour’ are embedded in the external context, in such a way that the external context constitutes part of the ‘manuscript’. Social practices will constantly be changing in conjunction with the flow of events that determines their contexts, along with the networks of ideas, beliefs and attitudes they reveal. Geertz’s model therefore implies that cultural meaning systems are necessarily developing combinations of ideas, rather than fixed patterns of perception.

The collective systems of understanding Geertz posits must encompass the social practices involved in contemporary mass polities, as Michel Foucault implies in his analysis of the relationship between truth and political power (Rabinow, 1991: pp. 51–76). Foucault asserts that nation-states could not exist in their current incarnation without a ‘truth regime’, which dictates the form and content of the statements to which a truth-value can be accorded (Rabinow, 1991: pp. 72–73). This ‘truth regime’ would have to be accepted by all the groups within a given polity, in order for it effectively to reproduce the power hierarchy it serves: the entire population has to agree on the type of discourse that relates to truth, otherwise it would be impossible for contemporary politicians to assert the legitimacy of their positions before the mass societies they governed. Systems of cultural meaning therefore determine the range of possible strategies and actions available to both politicians, and the general public.

Cultural meaning systems will also encompass the perceptions and ideas that mediate the formation of selves in relation to their surrounding social contexts; these ideas will include the various contemporary understandings of identity. However, this is not to assume the existence of

what Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper describe as the modern, Western notion of the self, a "homogeneous, bounded, unitary entity" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: p. 17). Jonathan Hearn (following Derek Layder) along with Brubaker and Cooper emphasise the continuity between the individual subject and their social environment (Hearn, 2007). Selves, others and communities are continuously negotiated within the 'systems of signification' they inhabit.

Since Geertz is not principally concerned with creating theoretical models, he does not discuss the relationship between his conception of culture and observed social practices in detail, nor does he examine the implication that culture as a system of meanings must be closely related to language and knowledge. Jean-François Lyotard's description of culture emphasises this connection, echoing Foucault's indication of the possibility for discrete cultures to be distinguished through their specific discursive practices (Lyotard, 1984). It indicates a way to identify the meaning and function of the ideas surrounding ethnic culture in the Russian Federation, through performing the 'reading' of social practice described by Geertz in the quotation above, without using purely ethnographic methods.

Lyotard contends that communication has a fundamental role in social practice. He describes us as living at the intersection of several "clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). However, "…we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). Following

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lyotard conceives of these ‘narrative language elements’ as taking the form of language games:

> What [Wittgenstein] means by this term is that each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put – in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them. (Lyotard, 1984: p. 10.)

Describing language as a ‘game’ assumes that utterances, or ‘speech acts’, are constructed according to the speaker’s particular aim, and their understanding of the ways language is used among their hearers. Lyotard echoes John Austin’s distinction between ‘locution’ and ‘illocution’ – i.e., the action of speaking, and the action performed by the speech itself (Wootton, 1975; Yurchak, 2006: pp. 21–22). A ‘speech act’ is essentially an attempt to use the various linguistic forms a speaker believes to be available, in order to achieve a specific end.

The supposition that ‘language games’ constitute social life, dictated by a collective understanding of the ways specific linguistic formulations can be used, has implications for the conception of knowledge, especially in relation to culture. It suggests that a given society’s knowledge is heavily dependent on the rules of its prevailing ‘language games’, insofar that knowledge is to a large extent determined by the form of its communication; at the same time, knowledge also enables people to participate in these language games. The variety of potential types of knowledge implied by this claim is reflected in the variety of different functions it can have, as Lyotard says:

> Knowledge, then, is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), of justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), of the beauty of a sound or colour (auditory and visual sensibility), etc. Understood in this way, knowledge is what makes someone capable of forming "good" denotative utterances, but also "good" prescriptive and "good" evaluative utterances. … From this derives one of the principal features of knowledge: it coincides with an extensive array of competence-building measures and is the only form embodied in a subject constituted by the various areas of competence composing it. (Lyotard, 1984: 18–19.)

Lyotard regards knowledge as a range of 'competences', which enable individuals to engage in specific 'language games', rather than an awareness of self-sufficient, universally applicable 'facts'.

For different systems of knowledge to exist, there has to be a consensus among the particular community that shares this knowledge as to the language games it informs. Since knowledge can also refer to qualitative or normative statements, this consensus will involve a collective way of formulating moral claims. According to Lyotard, culture is constituted by this consensus: "The consensus that permits such knowledge to be circumscribed and makes it possible to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn't (the foreigner, the child) is what constitutes the culture of a people" (Lyotard, 1984: p. 19). It is possible to regard Geertz's 'webs of significance' as closely related to Lyotard's representation of knowledge: the existence of both is dependent on social consensus, which they reflect in the conventionalised behaviours and discursive practices they maintain.

Language use is therefore based on a given community's mutual acceptance of specific networks of meanings, and hence on a series of

correlations in the way members of the community order and associate their experiences. Both language and knowledge would of necessity be in constant development, as the circumstances surrounding their society change. However, their capacity to influence collective responses to unforeseen events complicates their interaction with the external context, giving their development an independent momentum that distinguishes it from the flow of outside events. Discursive practice manifests a given community's consensus as to how experience can be understood and evaluated, in addition to the extensive collections of ideas, beliefs and skills that constitutes the community's knowledge. The systematic analysis of language therefore provides a way to interpret cultural systems of meaning, in order to locate the significance of a particular knowledge system, or 'area of competence' – such as the contemporary use and understanding of the ideas associated with Soviet nationalities ideology.

The suggestion that societies revolve around shared systems of understanding enables us to explain the development of ethnic identities and cultures within Russia over the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and to account for its complex interaction with contemporary politics. As discussed in Chapter One, the early Soviet government was presented with an imperative to homogenise the networks of ideas and practices that distinguished the various communities living on its territory, in order to create a population amenable to the Soviet state's assertion of authority. It had to inculcate the systems of knowledge and language that constituted its modern and Europeanised culture into the way the rest of the population understood and conducted their social experience. Its strategy involved promoting abstracted notions of 'ethnicity' and

'nationality', accompanied by a sustained attempt to introduce a specific perception of ethnic or national identity into its populations' self-awareness. These ideas were assimilated into the overlapping knowledge systems that cohered Soviet society – including the logic determining Soviet politics itself. They acquired a complex and changing significance within the networks of ideas that distinguished the communities forming the Soviet Union's different ethnic groups, which themselves entered a phase of rapid development under the influence of the homogenising Soviet policy. These ideas also generated a series of discursive practices in both political and personal communication, which reflected and reproduced their changing significances.

The development in language and knowledge initiated by the early Soviet government ultimately proved to be beyond political control, resulting in the various perceptions and attitudes towards ethnic identity and culture among non-Russians that could still hinder the federal government's state-building project. An investigation into the influence of non-Russian ethnic culture on the Russian Federation's politics benefits from a Foucauldian methodology, since it necessarily consists of identifying the functions of two associated Soviet-era ideas – ethnic identity and ethnic culture – within the complex of attitudes, perceptions and notions that forms the basis of social practice, in addition to the strategies used to maintain power hierarchies.[9] This identification includes analysing the extent to which these ideas refer to perceptible differences in outlook between particular non-Russian ethnic groups. A study of the speech acts that concern ethnic identity and culture, performed as a Geertzian 'reading' of the behaviours surrounding such communication, will reveal the ideas,

[9] As Paul Rabinow notes in his Introduction to *The Foucault Reader*, "Foucault is highly suspicious of claims to universal truths. He doesn't refute them; instead, his consistent response is to historicize grand abstractions." (Rabinow, 1991: p. 4)

attitudes and perceptions that constitute the way non-Russian ethnicity is experienced and understood in the Russian Federation. In doing so, it would show how the Soviet-era concept of 'ethnic culture' is developing, and its significance for both politicians and ordinary citizens.

Section 2.1.2: Mass media and cultural change in the Russian Federation

The mass media had a central role in the Sovietisation process, and continue to perform an important integrating function in the Russian Federation. This is in line with the findings of several authors who claim the mass media to have an essential role in shaping contemporary mass societies, among them Michael Billig, Benedict Anderson and Jürgen Habermas (Billig, 1995; Anderson, 1991; Habermas, 1964; 1996). Anderson and Habermas both assume that contemporary mass polities could not exist without a way for individual members of populations to interact with larger political entities they do not experience directly – which to a large extent consists of their national mass media. The mass media enable mass societies to form collective attitudes and responses, by presenting information within repetitive narrative conventions that help individuals to organise their impressions of the world. Theories of media effects suggest that "The media provide the materials for responding to experience and these accumulate over time in a long term process of socialisation" (McQuail, 1977: p. 76):

> Gerbner (1967) sees the key to the effects of mass media in their capacity to take over the 'cultivation' of images ideas and consciousness in an industrial society. He refers to the main process of mass media as that of 'publication' in the literal sense of making public: 'The

> truly revolutionary significance of modern mass communication is … the ability to form historically new bases for collective thought and action quickly, continuously and pervasively across the previous boundaries of time, space and states.' (McQuail, 1977: pp. 89–90.)

Mass communication acquires its power to 'socialise' individuals into mass societies in part from the imperative it presents journalists to attend to their audiences' perceptions, if they are to transmit their material successfully. Stuart Hall asserts that mass communication requires the 'encoding' of a message into a form in which it can be transmitted, before being 'decoded' by the audience. This refers to the technical process of constructing media products, but also to the conceptual structuring of the message into a 'story':

> A 'raw' historical event cannot, *in that form*, be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse. … To put it paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it can become a *communicative event*. (Hall, 1980: p. 129.)

As Hall describes, "distortions" or "misunderstandings" "…arise precisely from the *lack of equivalence* between the two sides in the communicative exchange" (Hall, 1980: p. 131): the journalist cannot control precisely how audience members will 'decode' their messages. However, this process is happening within the same overall cultural context:

> [codes in the communicative process] …refer signs to the 'maps of meaning' into which any culture is classified; and those 'maps of social reality' have the whole range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power and interest 'written in' to them. (Hall, 1980: p. 134.)

Mass media producers need to have an accurate perception of their target audience's mindset, in order to 'encode' the information they seek to transmit into a way that their audience will understand and accept. Producers are likely to share this mindset to some extent, since they live and work in the same overall social context as their audience. Successful mass communication takes place within the shared networks of understanding described in the previous section, according the linguistic conventions they recognise. Mass media discourse therefore serves to integrate new ideas and events into a mass society's knowledge systems, facilitating their development as circumstances change, while simultaneously cohering the society through its repetition of familiar discursive practice.

The role of the mass media in the reproduction of modern mass cultures extends to the maintenance of political hierarchies, through their capacity constantly to disseminate representations of reality that legitimise the political status quo. Billig describes how the repeated 'flagging' of nation states in the western mass media leads to specific notions of nationhood being accepted as common sense (Billing, 1995). This 'banal nationalism' is powerful enough for national populations to accept the wars their leaders initiate, if these wars are said to defend the nation-state (Billig, 1995: p. 2). A literature has developed against the background of classical political geography, which seeks to address the geopolitical influence of the "constitutive role of discourse in establishing and maintaining hegemonic regimes of representation" (Mawdsley, 2008: p. 510). These studies aim to elucidate the contentions in popular discourses that are generally treated

and accepted as 'common sense', although in reality they have an important role in the reproduction of hegemonic power dynamics (Megoran, 2004; 2005; Mawdsley, 2008; McFarlane and Hay, 2003; Boykoff, 2007; Robison, 2004). For example, Thomas McFarlane and Iain Hay show how the prominent Australian broadsheet *The Australian* disseminated neoliberal hegemonic discourse, through its representation of environmental protesters at the 1999 World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle (McFarlane and Hay, 2003). Most of these authors analyse mass media discourse in Western nation states, however Nick Megoran has investigated the role discourses on borders and geopolitical danger have had within the domestic power struggles of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (Megoran, 2004; 2005). This dissertation places a similar emphasis on drawing out the ideas so embedded in a newspaper's representation of reality that they can be accepted unquestioningly as 'common sense', through the systematic reading of a sample of newspaper articles. However, the focus of investigation here is the specific set of ideas relating to Soviet-era ethnicity, existing within a range of potentially hegemonic public discourses, rather than the state hegemonies themselves.

The integration of Soviet ideology into the Soviet Union's social life could not have occurred without the Soviet mass media. The Soviet government regarded the mass media as an essential aid to the creation of a communist society throughout the Soviet period, so that the form and content of the Soviet Union's mass communication corresponded to the nature of the state project that generated it (Voltmer, 2000: p. 477). According to Marxist-Leninist ideology,

the role of journalism was not to inform or entertain but to formulate the type of citizen that will create a communist society (Mickiewicz, 1988: p. 26). Journalists were regarded as teachers rather than fellow-workers, implying a superiority in knowledge and understanding. Soviet citizens were subject to a constant stream of mass communication, designed to reinforce a particular understanding of the Soviet Union, its relationship with the outside world, and their position within it – which included the presentation of an ideal Soviet personality. The specific conception of ethnic identity which Soviet ideology promoted was incorporated into this representation, as part of the state attempt to change its populations' cultures. The mass media thus played an important role in the development of contemporary ideas about ethnicity in the Russian Federation, by encouraging their audiences to perceive their ethnic identities according to the parameters expressed repeatedly in mass media narratives.

However, a communist society could not be created by mass media discourse alone: mass media narratives have to have some correspondence with their audiences' lives and experiences, if they are to be understood and accepted. The Soviet mass media and their discourse were incorporated into the all-encompassing system of institution and practice described in Chapter One, which enabled the Soviet government and its citizens to conduct their lives within the boundaries imposed by the need to equate Soviet ideological narratives with reality (Christel Lane, 1981; Yurchak, 2006). The mass media created a public discursive space that integrated the Soviet population, its institutions and practices around a consistent demonstration of the ideological narratives appropriate at the time, and the various discursive practices they could generate – including at times the direct criticism of authority figures

(Mickiewicz, 1988; Yurchak 2006). They also had a number of specific roles within the functioning of the Soviet institutions themselves.

The press was a particularly important medium during the Soviet period. Television networks that could broadcast throughout the Soviet Union were developed only during the 1970s, and television itself was not regarded as a politically significant mass communicator until the1980s (Mickiewicz, 1988: p. 32).[10] The Soviet press was embedded within the hierarchical system of organisations that constituted the Soviet polity. Each newspaper belonged to a different organisation – such as a local branch of the Communist Party, a factory, or a worker's council. Exchanges of criticism and debates had to occur within the boundaries set by the newspapers' function, which would change according to the needs of the group that controlled it. The press had a valuable role as mediator between the government and the population. Soviet newspapers frequently published audience letters: it was common to write to a local newspaper with complaints or praise, and people with poor access to power and resources could regard newspapers as their best hope. Newspapers enabled the Soviet Union's different institutions and communities to negotiate their occasionally competitive relationships, even if limited by their need to remain within the fundamental discursive parameters set by dominant members of the Communist Party (Dagbaev, 1995; Murray, 1994; Voltmer, 2000).

The Russian Federation's public and private discursive spheres, and their interaction, have been in a process of rapid transformation since *perestroika* began in 1985 (Zassourskiy, 2002; Zassourskiy, 2001; Koltsova, 2001; Mickiewicz, 1997; Belin, 2002; McNair, 2000; Davis, Hammond and

[10] Ellen Mickiewicz contends that *glasnost'* was introduced as part of the government's strategy to cope with the huge social changes the development of a universal state television system in the 1970s produced (Mickiewicz, 1988).

Nizamova, 1998). The network of Soviet media organisations has fragmented in conjunction with the network of institutions enveloping Soviet society, removing the nationwide public sphere that could inform the running of every community and institution in the country. Russia's difficult economic circumstances during the 1990s forced many media organisations to sell controlling stakes to major economic or political figures, creating a mix of government- and privately sponsored media organs, with a corresponding variety of function. The popularity of local mass media has risen dramatically, to the point where the previously centralised Soviet market has broken up into a series of regional markets. Some media organs are now primarily commercial ventures, producing their material according to the overwhelming imperative to attract a paying audience.

The range of commercial and quasi-commercial mass communication exists in tandem with a series of government-sponsored media organs, many of which are newspapers, which remain from the Soviet-era media network. Regional and sub-regional administrations generally own at least one newspaper, which is understood and expected to further the aims of its sponsoring organisation. Government-sponsored newspapers, whether owned by republican or sub-regional administrations, have a number of universally applicable official functions. One is publishing new legislation: according to the federal constitution, legislation cannot come into force until it is published in the press. Government-sponsored newspapers are regarded as forums for high-level political discussion. They disseminate political communications on behalf of their government organisation, in addition to acting as an important information source for government workers and businessmen. Government-sponsored

newspapers are closely integrated into their respective administrations' functioning, as were their Soviet-era equivalents. Their content manifests the attitudes and strategies that influence their political institution's activities.

Vladimir Putin has succeeded in asserting the Presidential administration's control over many of Russia's media organs, after the public battles between powerful mass media owners that characterised Boris Yeltsin's administration, in particular over the national television channels (Belin, 2002; Zassourskiy, 2001). Opposition journalism is now limited to marginal liberal or radical newspapers, radio stations or websites. The broadcast media in particular produce a more homogeneous range of content than in the 1990s, since their owners and functions are consistently loyal to Putin's interests. However, the mass media still have a wider range of ownership and motivation than Soviet-era mass media. They produce a greater variety of speech act, and therefore their content has a range of significances for both individuals, and society as a whole. The different individual media organisations present several overlapping regional or class-based discursive spheres, rather than variations on a set of discursive practices arranged by the central government, as in the Soviet Union.

Thus the process by which mass communication reinforces and coheres the attitudes held by the Russian Federation's citizens has undergone a qualitative change, and now occurs in a fragmented discursive space. These discursive spheres contain the repetitive promotion of the ideas deemed to be attractive to target audiences, in addition to statements that aim to achieve specific political ends. The discursive practice in regional discursive spheres varies considerably, and is often strongly influenced by the routine intentions

and strategies of local politicians and businessmen, **as I will explain in the following section.**

The different media discourses, produced for very different reasons by very different actors, can now show both popular attitudes, and political strategy. They are likely to be influencing perceptions of ethnicity in several different ways, while simultaneously reproducing their formulation and significance in a number of discursive contexts.

Mass communication can be regarded as a specific category of speech act, with characteristics that make it suitable for investigating the nature and function of particular knowledge systems within a mass society. On a practical level, it is especially useful to a foreigner conducting research in the Siberian context – given the suspicion both Russian and non-Russian Siberians can evince towards foreign investigators, **also described in detail in the following section.**

The speech acts produced by mass media organs have a much more consistent range of motivations and conventions than those that occur during face-to-face conversation. Journalists 'encode' their material into the form they believe will achieve their intention – whether this is attracting a paying audience, encouraging a population to accept a particular version of events, or some other exercise. They receive limited feedback from their audiences, and so are forced to rely on reproducing formulas that appear to have the desired effect, developed on the basis of their own perceptions of both their audiences and the material itself. The motivations behind speech acts in the mass media arise from the specific social, economic and political circumstances of their media organisation, rather than the complex ebb and flow of personal emotion and perception.

Defining the motivation, meaning and significance of a mass communication is therefore relatively easy, if enough is known about the circumstances around it. The speech acts themselves cannot change once they have been made: they continue clearly to exhibit the specific set of circumstances, decisions and attitudes that led to their construction. This consistency facilitates the quantification of ideas, meanings and motivations appearing over a given time period – so that the interpretation of mass media speech acts can be combined with the production of empirical data. The Russian Federation's mass media therefore present an opportunity to perform the detailed analysis required by the complexity of post-Soviet ethnicity, while generating the quantitative data needed to make valid assertions about its political influence.

Interpreting the speech acts produced by mass media organs reveals networks of ideas and attitudes, which will have a range of possible significances for individual target audience members. Some will have personal relevance for their target audience, presented repeatedly over a period of time in order to stimulate the sympathetic emotional response that encourages individuals to attend to mass communication. Mass media speech acts can therefore reveal ways of understanding ethnic culture and identity. The attitudes of their producers will echo the necessarily abstracted perceptions that lead to political action: like journalists, politicians have to rely on generalised conceptions of their populations' beliefs, whether these arise from their own suppositions, or systematic investigation. The mass media will also contain speech acts that manifest directly the way notions like ethnic culture are understood and manipulated by the political sphere, since it is one of the means by which politicians promote and legitimise themselves.

The Russian Federation's regional newspapers have the greatest variety of ownership, and therefore also of motivation and speech act. The relative simplicity of newspaper production facilitates the development of newspapers orientated towards smaller and more closely defined communities than television or radio, while allowing newspapers to be more responsive to variations in their target audiences' attitudes. Newspapers do not have television's capacity to create a strong sensual impact, and therefore have to rely more on the meaning and relevance of their stories in order to attract an audience. They offer a greater variety of discursive and intellectual strategies, in a form that is simpler to analyse in detail. Local commercial newspapers are under an especially strong imperative to attend to their audiences' concerns and attitudes, in order to create a sufficiently attractive and relevant discursive product to ensure the newspaper's commercial viability. It is possible to assume that the journalists working on popular commercial newspapers have a good understanding of their audiences, since individual members of the public find their product meaningful enough to be worth the money and time needed to read the newspaper.

A qualitative and quantitative analysis of mainstream regional newspapers will reveal ideas about non-Russian ethnicity that are important both to politicians and the ordinary population, in addition to the use and function of the various notions of 'ethnic culture' within different social and political practices. The analysis of the entire content produced by the newspapers over a given time period will show how the discursive strategies that concern perceptions of non-Russian ethnic culture interact with other important knowledge systems in each region. It will have the capacity to reveal the

developing significance of ethnicity within superficially unrelated thematic contexts, thus allowing for the extensive integration of the Soviet ideology on nationalities described in Chapter One**: it will locate both the 'flagging' of 'common sense' notions of ethnicity, and the explicit contestation around these sets of ideas.** A further comparison of these ideas in two specific contexts – the Republics of Sakha (Yakutia) and Buryatia – will indicate trends in the understanding and manipulation of ethnicity that are relevant to the Russian Federation as a whole.

Section 2.2: Methodology

Section 2.2.1: Media markets and regional newspapers in the Republics of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia)

My data collection began with a pilot field trip in November and December 2004, during which I gathered information about the newspaper markets in Sakha (Yakutia), Buryatia and the neighbouring Irkutsk *Oblast'*.[11] I hoped to identify each region's main newspapers, their owners and readerships, as part of a broader attempt to understand the way newspaper markets in eastern Siberia function, and their political and social roles. I wanted to check the viability of the research project, and explore the possibility of balancing the newspaper data with audience research. I spent this trip conducting semi-structured interviews in Moscow, Irkutsk, and the capitals

[11] **I had initially hoped to include a sample of newspaper material from Irkutsk, a Russian-dominated city and region, which would show how perceptions of Russian ethnicity are developing. I succeeded in gathering the newspaper data, but when I got back to Cambridge I realised that I would not be able to include Irkutsk in this dissertation.**

of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), Ulan Ude and Yakutsk respectively. I spoke to six academics in Moscow – two anthropologists working on Siberia, and four media specialists; in Irkutsk, three media academics, the journalist and main editor of the region's government-sponsored newspaper, a director of an independent newspaper company, the director of the Irkutsk branch of a Moscow-based newspaper company, the director of an environmental charity, and a museum curator and history specialist. I interviewed in Yakutsk a journalist and main editor from two newspapers, an anthropologist, a secretary at the state university, a local businessman, and the editors of the region's government-sponsored newspapers. Finally, in Ulan Ude I met a Buryat national writer, the editor of the government-sponsored Buryat-language newspaper, a journalist on a commercial newspaper and her friend, a public relations specialist, the Republic's Minister of the Press, and two specialists in Mongolian history.

Almost all of my informants were very generous and helpful, however there were limitations on what they felt able to tell me. For example, they were sometimes happy to tell me the names of the individuals or organisations that owned their region's newspapers, but they were less forthcoming on the relationships these actors had with other businessmen and politicians. A newspaper owner's interests have a strong influence on its content, as I will explain below; a list of names on its own does not reveal very much about the likely motivations of a newspaper's editorial team. I realised that coming to a full understanding of each region's media market was a PhD project in itself, and so decided to design a method for my newspaper analysis that would take owner influence into account, but

which would not require an exhaustive study of each media market's political economy.

I continued to interact with academics, journalists and ordinary citizens during my main field trip in 2005, in the limited time I had that was not taken up with gathering newspaper material – while making an effort to attend all the local cultural events I could manage, such as the traditional Buryat *Surkharban*, a summer sports tournament. As part of this, I got to know sociologists, anthropologists, historians and university administration workers at Irkutsk's state university, anthropologists, historians, Buryat nationalist activists and media specialists in Ulan Ude, and trainee teachers, media specialists, Sakha nationalist activists, anthropologists and students in Yakutsk, in addition to the five newspaper journalists who interviewed me for their respective publications in Sakha (Yakutia). I was fortunate in coinciding with two American anthropologists in Ulan Ude, with whom I was able to discuss my experiences. I have continued corresponding with my Siberian friends and colleagues since returning to Britain, while periodically visiting Buryat and Sakha websites and chatrooms.

I tried in each region to obtain audience research from newspapers, universities or advertising agencies, or conduct focus groups myself. There was very little audience research available, and newspapers or advertising agencies were often unwilling to share what they had. Organising focus groups proved to be impossible, partly from lack of time, but also because ordinary east Siberians tend to be wary of unfamiliar researchers, especially if they are foreign. I found out in Irkutsk that the only people willing to participate in sociological studies are the regular 'professional

focus group attendees', who hope to supplement their incomes. My attempt to conduct unstructured interviews in a sub-region of Sakha (Yakutia) was unsuccessful, because my informants were so terrified of the situation that they were visibly distressed. (Most of them agreed to be interviewed because I happened to be staying with their boss. It was obvious that they were torn between a desire to help me, and a fear that I could turn out to be a spy.) I believe it is impossible to use their information, for both ethical and practical reasons. These interviews paralleled Megoran's experience with audience research in Kyrgyzstan; his interviewees "either tended to repeat the messages in government newspapers, or vouchsafed dissenting opinions on the understanding of anonymity, rendering their material difficult to use" (Megoran, 2004: p. 739). Like Megoran, I decided to focus on the newspaper data, using my informal contact with local friends and colleagues as a way to increase my understanding of the newspaper articles. I will not name my informants unless referring to their published research, in order to avoid the possibility of causing them trouble, and thereby betraying the trust they placed in me when agreeing to talk openly about their experience.

The Russian Federation's mass media and their markets differ considerably from region to region. However, **I found** enough similarities **to** exist between Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia)'s mass media to enable the comparison of equivalent media organisations – in particular, local newspapers. In Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) these compete with a variety of broadcast and Internet media, produced for both federal and regional audiences. Newspapers continue

to attract mass audiences in both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), retaining their significance for both politicians and ordinary people. Lyudmilla Badmayeva contends that the importance of the press in Buryatia has in fact grown, despite the huge drops in newspaper circulations that have occurred, principally due to economic hardship. Badmayeva found in 2002 that 59.1 per cent of a sample of businessmen said they read republican newspapers (Badmayeva, 2002a: p. 80). Politicians value the press sufficiently to support unprofitable newspapers, while elections are accompanied by the appearance of 'one day' newspapers (*odnodnevniki*). Buryatia's ordinary citizens try to read newspapers when they can. If they are unable to buy newspapers, they borrow them from neighbours or go to the local library.

Sakha (Yakutia)'s print market has significantly declined over the past decade, partly because of the collapses in the economy, but also because of the increasing difficulties in newspaper distribution caused by the loss of Soviet transportation infrastructures. However, newspapers are still a significant source of information. According to research carried out by the newspaper *Yakutia* in 2003, 64.3 per cent of the population gain information about current events from newspapers, compared to 86.3 per cent and 28.1 per cent from television and radio respectively. The research conducted by Buryatia's and Sakha (Yakutia)'s advertising agencies has led them to draw similar conclusions, since they invest considerable amounts of capital in newspaper advertising. The most popular commercial newspapers in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), *Inform Polis* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* respectively, are owned by organisations that also function as advertising agencies.

Mass media consumption in both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) is much affected by the size of their territories, in conjunction with their sparse populations. The more remote settlements in both Republics have a very limited access to the Internet and to privately owned broadcast and print media, due to insufficient transportation and broadcast infrastructures. The mass media sources generally available to rural audiences consist of the federal broadcast channels, republican government-owned newspapers that have retained their Soviet-era distribution networks, and the newspapers produced in the sub-region concerned. Every sub-region in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) contains a newspaper owned by the local area administration, often left over from the Soviet period, while the more prosperous and densely populated sub-regions may also produce privately owned sub-regional newspapers. The capital cities in each Republic, Ulan Ude and Yakutsk, together with the larger towns, support diverse media markets containing a variety of privately owned print and broadcast media.

The privately owned commercial newspapers were selected from the newspaper markets in Ulan Ude and Yakutsk, partly because these towns have mixed Russian and non-Russian populations – unlike the newer industrial towns that are dominated by Russians – and are thus under an imperative to address the issue of ethnicity in some way. Another reason for the choice is that the commercial newspapers published in the capitals have a closer connection with their republican administrations, giving them a greater relevance for the Republics' entire populations than the newspapers from other towns. Some of the commercial newspapers under analysis claimed to have widespread distribution networks, showing that they aspired towards audiences outside Ulan

Ude and Yakutsk, and hence were designing their content for republic-wide audiences.

I found during my pilot research trip evidence that journalists in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) do have to negotiate the requirements of the regional business and political elites, in common with journalists in other parts of the Russian Federation. For example, the journalists I spoke to in Buryatia mentioned that the Republic of Buryatia's only printing press is owned by the state, making it easy for the republican government to monitor and control the Republic's newspapers. Working conditions in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) **seemed to** have much in common with the Saint Petersburg newspapers **Olessia Koltsova** describes, on the basis of her **ethnographic research.** She **reveals the close relationship that can exist between journalists and politicians:**

> The boundaries between media organisations and their environment are blurred, and real people often form teams across them, as well as divide into competing groups within their institutions. 'State' actors tend to form temporary alliances among themselves and with external agents and pursue their short-term group interest rather than the interests of 'the state'. (Koltsova, 2001: p. 319)

These complex relationships create a dynamic and unstable working environment, as Koltsova describes:

> Values are unclear and rules are predominantly informal, individuals identify themselves with their institutions very loosely, and act counter to institutional interests; agents make choices in an atmosphere of uncertainly and relatively low predictability; their decisions are

> situational and their strategies are short-term. … In this situation, it is not surprising that owner control is most often legitimised by journalists (though they admit that in theory it is not desirable). To 'work for the company's policy' is considered normal and even a mark of professionalism. (Koltsova, 2001: pp. 319, 323)

My fieldwork and subsequent newspaper analysis was eventually to reveal that the journalists, politicians and businessmen in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) form relatively cohesive communities – as might be expected, given these Republics' small populations and remote situation. Many of the actors involved know each other personally, if not by reputation. The working atmospheres in Sakha (Yakutia), and to a lesser extent Buryatia, are similar to that described by Koltsova: decisions are erratic and unpredictable, reflecting the flows of events and personal relationships within elite communities.

The elites can exert their control over journalists directly, in specific instances. However, the restriction of newspaper content generally takes the form of self-censorship, within particular working cultures: the journalists have a good idea of what they can get away with, although they are capable of testing the boundaries. Conversely, influential politicians and businessmen feel they know and can trust the people who work for them, and hence can allow their editorial collectives a high degree of autonomy in the day-to-day running of the newspaper. Censorship therefore is not complete – the assumptions elites make about different working collectives mean that journalists can find ways of slipping challenging statements into print, without the establishment knowing. (This practice is discussed more fully in Chapter Three.) The journalists' self-censorship also mirrors more

general practices, arising from the pressures exerted by these Republics' forceful and unpredictable power hierarchies, which are described in Chapters Three and Five. Individual citizens from all walks of life in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) can often find themselves under a requirement to communicate with care, whether they are protecting their interests, or attempting to exploit a situation in their turn.

The limitations on journalistic freedom in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) do not remove the capacity of republican newspapers to reflect local cultural attitudes. Commercial newspapers in both Republics need to attract an audience for their advertisers. Nonetheless they have to strike a balance, producing what the public will buy, but also publishing the articles demanded by their political or commercial patrons, and avoiding the consequences of publishing undesirable material. The strategies **newspapers use to resolve** the contradictions generated by these demands form a complex mix (as Chapters Three and Five show), primarily revolving around their journalists' attempts to create close relationships with imagined audiences. In doing so, these journalists point the way towards the perceptions of Buryat or Sakha ethnicity held by members of the public.

I was aware from an early stage that my method of analysis was going to have to allow for the presence of political interference. I needed to find a way to elucidate the functions of the narratives on ethnicity, in order to judge their significance and meaning; this entails an understanding of a given newspaper's role within the broader republican community, and the motivations of its journalists. The analysis method had to enable a comparison of the assertions made by different newspapers, in order to build up a

convincing picture of the circumstances within which they were produced – while simultaneously establishing their intended function within these circumstances, along with its effect on their representation. **It uses a combination of coding and interpretation to achieve this, as the following section explains in detail.**

The two chapters on each Republic analyse separately the newspapers as a whole and their discourses on Buryat and Sakha culture. Chapter Three on Buryatia and Chapter Five on Sakha (Yakutia) present a content analysis of each newspaper's themes, enabling as far as possible an objective view of their relative functions within each Republic's newspaper market. A further analysis of the ideas occurring repeatedly in each newspaper's discourse provided a more detailed knowledge of their individual motivations, leading to a fuller picture of each Republic's current affairs. Chapters Four and Six, on Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) respectively, contain content analyses of the references to Buryat and Sakha ethnicity in each newspaper. These occur as mentions of Buryat or Sakha 'ethnic culture' in the abstract, or as ideas and practices associated in the Republics with the Buryat and Sakha ethnic groups in particular. The content analysis in both cases is followed by a detailed description and interpretation of the articles in question, showing how their representation of ethnicity corresponds to the material presented in Chapters Three and Five. The discourse analysis in all the chapters explains the results obtained through the content analyses, building on the quantitative data to generate a detailed understanding of the newspapers, and of the underlying assumptions behind their use of ethnic culture. Sakha (Yakutia)'s economic and political setting is more complex than that of Buryatia, since its extensive natural resources accord it a greater

significance for the Russian Federation as a whole than Buryatia. Chapters Five and Six on Sakha (Yakutia) build on the material presented in the earlier chapters on Buryatia, which explained influences and practices common to both Republics.

The audience research I was given showed *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus* to be among the most popular newspapers in Ulan Ude, while *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* are widely read in Yakutsk. **I was able to ascertain that *Yakutsk Vecherniy* is directed by Vyacheslav Levin, a powerful businessman. *Nashe Vremya* was owned in 2004 by three organisations – a non-commercial fund called Semya Severa, the Stolitsa media holding, and the Prima advertising agency. Both *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus* are owned by advertising agencies.** *Inform Polis* and *Nashe Vremya* are intended for audiences with a higher level of education and social capital than *Pyatnitsa Plyus* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy*. In addition to these locally produced newspapers, there are newspapers owned by Moscow-based commercial companies, which try to attract regional audiences by adding region-specific supplements to the editions distributed throughout the entire Federation. The most popular federal commercial newspapers in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) are *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and *Argumenty i Fakty* respectively. These newspapers' attraction is however limited by their reduced ability to cover local news. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and *Argumenty i Fakty* were nevertheless included in the content analysis, to develop an understanding of the discursive practices occurring in the Moscow-based mass media, against which the republican newspaper discourse could be compared.

The most prominent government newspapers in each Republic are the

Russian-language newspapers *Buryatia* and *Yakutia*, owned by the executive administrations of the Republics of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) respectively. Both of these were included in the analysis. The republican-level government newspapers have variable readerships that go beyond the classes of government worker with a professional interest in the information they provide. This is especially true of *Yakutia*, thanks to its more attractive, populist articles, and the dynamism of Sakha (Yakutia)'s government.

Newspaper readerships are also influenced by the Republics' demographic characteristics, and the current use of the Buryat and Sakha languages. The use of Buryat language is decreasing, whereas the Sakha language continues to be widely spoken. As a result, some of Yakutsk's commercial newspapers are published in Sakha, as is the government-sponsored *Sakha Sire*, while Ulan Ude's commercial newspapers are almost exclusively Russian-language. Buryatia's administration, however, continues to produce a newspaper (*Buryaad Unen*) in Buryat. Non-Russian language newspapers were part of the Soviet strategy for resolving the problem of ethnic identity, and continue to have an important role in the way post-Soviet administrations deal with this issue. *Buryaad Unen* has a very low readership, since Buryatia's few remaining Buryat speakers find its specific literary dialect difficult to read. *Sakha Sire* in contrast has a high readership, especially in agricultural areas. This reflects the demographic changes in Sakha (Yakutia) brought on by Sovietisation and its consequences. While the Russian and Sakha populations are roughly equal, the latter are concentrated in the agricultural regions around Yakutsk, and the Slavic populations live in the industrial towns built during the Soviet era. This situation is complicated by the current migration of rural Sakha

populations into Yakutsk, but *Sakha Sire* remains a popular news source in the Republic's Sakha-dominated sub-regions. These sub-regions' administrations also publish their newspapers almost entirely in Sakha. Buryatia's sub-regional newspapers on the other hand are generally published in Russian, although they sometimes contain Buryat-language articles or pages (Graber, unpublished).[12]

Sub-regional government-owned newspapers in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) tend to have high readerships within their administrative territories, since they are useful sources of local information, while acting as 'notice-boards' for their communities. They contain speech acts that have a high relevance for the communities they serve, while revealing the political practices and discursive strategies occurring in their sub-regions. Each Republic's sample included a representative sub-regional government-sponsored newspaper, chosen from regions with typical populations and economies. The sub-regional newspaper selected for Buryatia's sample is the Russian-language *Barguzinskaya Pravda,* from Barguzin sub-region, while Sakha (Yakutia)'s sub-regional newspaper is the Sakha-language *Erkeeyi,* from Maya sub-region. The opportunity to visit both areas and interview their inhabitants facilitated the analysis of their newspapers.

The full quantitative and interpretative analysis was performed on the government newspapers *Buryatia* and *Yakutia,* the sub-regional government newspaper *Barguzinskaya Pravda,* and the republican commercial newspapers *Inform Polis*, *Pyatnitsa Plyus*, *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy*. The federal-level newspapers *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and *Argumenty i Fakty* were subjected to the content analysis, while translated material from *Sakha Sire,*

[12] Katrin Graber is currently writing a doctoral thesis on the use of Buryat language in Buryatia's sub-regional newspapers, and was kind enough to share her data with me.

Erkeeyi and *Buryaad Unen* were interpreted in the light of what had been learned from the other newspapers. The full sample of each newspaper consisted of the editions published during the month of June 2004, and over the period between 25 August and 22 September 2004. These periods were selected in order to compare a relatively uneventful month (June) with a month around an event that had a major significance for the entire Russian Federation – the hostage taking in North Ossetia on 1 September 2004, and Putin's consequent decision to abolish regional voting for the Presidents and Governors of the Russian Federation's regions. This made it possible to gauge the significance of important federal events on the newspaper content, and thus increase the understanding of their news agendas and functions.

The samples contained around forty editions of the daily newspapers *Buryatia*, *Yakutia* and *Sakha Sire*, and eight to ten editions of the remaining weekly newspapers. These samples provide a sufficient amount of material to reveal the way Buryat and Sakha ethnicity is consistently understood and used in these Republics' mainstream public discourse, when analysed according to the method described in the following section. Many of the newspapers based in the republican capitals have websites, making it possible to monitor changes and developments in their content since the samples were published, and hence to verify the long-term relevance of the knowledge systems identified during the analysis.

Section 2.2.2: The analysis method

The newspaper analysis aimed to locate the communicative acts made by the publications described above concerning Buryat and Sakha ethnicity, with a

view to identifying the beliefs and intentions that led to their formation. Its method was developed on the assumption that these communicative acts are integrated into a variety of apparently unrelated discourses, and therefore necessitated a comprehensive survey of the newspaper content, **as section 2.1.2 describes.** The articles themselves were understood to be distinct speech acts, both determined by and contributing towards the speech act performed by the newspaper as a whole. It would be impossible to define the function of a newspaper article, and therefore the presuppositions behind its construction, without a detailed knowledge of its newspaper's functions. This in turn requires a good understanding of the context within which the newspaper is published. The analysis also had to provide the required combination of detailed interpretation and empirical data on their treatment of non-Russian ethnic culture. It therefore had several stages, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to deconstruct the newspaper as a whole, rather than focusing exclusively on the articles that concerned the Buryat and Sakha ethnic groups. Investigating these newspapers' discussion of the Buryat and Sakha within an analysis of the entire newspaper also made a comparison with other themes possible, thus establishing the relative importance of ethnicity-related issues within the newspapers' overall output.

The newspapers in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) constantly reproduce different formulations of the same assertions. Their content is so repetitive that sufficient experience of a given newspaper enables the reader to predict an article's narrative from its headlines and rubrics. This is to be expected, since the producers of these articles, their personal inclinations and their circumstances will change at a slower rate than the succession of events the

production of a weekly or daily newspaper requires them to depict. The repetition in fact demonstrates the mass media's capacity to integrate new events and ideas into familiar discursive practices, described in Section 2.1. These repeated assertions interact with more generalised themes and functions to form the newspaper's characteristic genres and narratives. For example, *Inform Polis* contained a series of articles that recounted a narrative about a stubborn citizen's fight for justice. A superficial description of these articles might identify them as typical 'human interest' stories, produced by a commercial paper to entertain its readers; however, a close reading showed that they were distinctive and repetitive enough to constitute a genre specific to *Inform Polis*, which repeatedly calls on Buryatia's citizens to be more proactive in their dealings with government institutions. Such stories present a particularly clear formulation of one of *Inform Polis*' main contentions. These consistent article genres and narratives are the means by which newspapers try to carry out their main functions, and therefore organise the choice and presentation of the events the newspapers describe. **Many media analysts call these narratives 'frames', and draw attention to their capacity to help "journalists and readers organise the world by drawing attention to particular aspects of a reality described" (McFarlane and Hay, 2003: p. 217). 'Frames'** reveal their producers' basic presuppositions about their audiences, in addition to any substantive changes in the newspapers' circumstances that have required their producers to adapt their material and its function to a new status quo**: these changes can produce 'critical discourse moments', when events "'potentially challenge existing discursive positions and constructs or, in**

contrast, may contribute to their further sedimentation'" (Carvalho, 2005, in Boykoff, 2007: p. 474).

The analysis method therefore had to identify the series of overlapping claims that dominate each newspaper's content. They appear in a huge variety of forms, depending on the changing circumstances of each newspaper, and the particular current events it covers. Coming to an understanding of a newspaper's speech act is a cyclical process, since the overlapping networks of ideas it contains can only be encountered chronologically as the newspaper reports unfold a continuous succession of events. This succession does not correspond to the rhythm of change within the newspaper's immediate surroundings, and so creates a disjuncture between the reader's experience of a consecutive development of newspaper stories, and the subtle configuration of circumstances and ideas that constitutes the newspaper's speech act. This disjunction makes it impossible to understand a newspaper's content fully without re-forming the linear succession of article narratives into networks of repeated ideas. With repeated readings it proved possible to detach a newspaper's contentions from their position in the newspaper's successive presentation of material.

The complex and dynamic interaction between circumstance and newspaper convention meant that the process of investigating these newspapers in relation to their surroundings was self-reflexive, as was the process of identifying their discussion of ethnicity. A reflexive method of analysis enabled patterns of ideas located after an extensive reading of the sample to be referred back to articles read at an earlier stage. A greater knowledge of a newspaper's repeated narratives and genres revealed the likely motivations and beliefs of its journalists, which themselves increased the understanding of intentions,

strategies and circumstances identifiable through its articles – while also clarifying the presuppositions behind these newspapers' representations of the Buryat and Sakha.

Atlas Ti software has been designed to facilitate the analytical technique, developed by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, known as 'grounded theory' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This technique initially requires a given text to be broken down into phrases or ideas, to which the researcher assigns concepts or 'codes' (Flick, 1998). **Maxwell Boykoff's study of American and British newspapers uses this technique, in combination with qualitative analysis (Boykoff, 2007).** Atlas Ti makes it possible to create a series of codes and connect them to relevant statements in the text, while attaching extensive notes to sections of text, to the codes themselves, or to the entire analytical project. It quantifies the number of times the codes are used, while recording the specific statements to which the codes are connected. In this research, Atlas Ti enabled a quantitative content analysis that consisted of attaching codes denoting particular themes and functions to the articles published over a monthly sample period, and hence establishing the number of times these themes and functions appeared over the month concerned. For example, the code 'Ethnic Culture' was attached to all the articles that mentioned a conception of ethnic culture, and the code 'Information' to all the articles that aimed to inform their readers, rather than entertain or shock them.

The samples of daily newspapers contained so much material that only the June sample needed to be coded in order to gain an accurate idea of their consistent narratives – even though the weekly newspapers were much larger than the dailies, consisting of on average forty tabloid pages, rather than around

eight tabloid pages (*Buryatia*) or six broadsheet pages (*Yakutia*). All the articles in the news sections of both the daily and weekly Russian-language editions appearing over the month of June were coded, together with the articles in the news sections of the weekly editions published during the August-September sample period. This method of coding made it possible to compare, for example, the number of times the newspapers mentioned ethnicity over the period of one month, or the different ways they treated the same news event. The month of June was a sufficient sample to show how the daily newspapers' repeated narratives interacted with the flow of surrounding events, the difference between dailies and weeklies being that the former have to react more quickly to unfolding circumstances. Nevertheless, the analysis of the June dailies was supplemented by comparisons with their August-September samples.

The material for the quantitative analysis consisted of all the headlines from the samples (which had been transcribed during the 2005 field trip), together with a sufficient number of photocopies (approximately two-thirds of the entire sample) to ensure that there were enough examples of the newspapers' genres to code the articles that had not been photocopied. The codes referred to the article as a whole, since the photocopied articles were read for a second time while coding, as were any notes made during the transcription of headlines from articles that were not photocopied.

The coding increased the validity of the discourse analysis, since it made it possible simultaneously to locate and quantify the newspapers' specific narrative elements, while providing quantitative data that corroborated the general trends identified through the discourse analysis. Atlas Ti enables notes to be attached during the coding process, thus initiating the cycle of close

reading and interpretation that reveals the newspapers' main narratives, genres and functions in detail. Codes could be used to mark the occurrence of seemingly important narrative elements for future reference, by creating specific codes or combinations of codes. For example, the codes 'Environmental Crisis' and 'Accident' were attached to the articles in *Yakutia* that recounted its repetitive narrative about flooding or forest fires. Atlas Ti's 'query tool' could then locate the instances of this narrative by collecting all the articles in *Yakutia*'s sample marked with the combination 'Environmental Crisis' and 'Accident', showing how many times this narrative was repeated. Atlas Ti's capacity to list the articles connected to a particular code could also be used to find relevant articles – for example, a list of the articles marked with the code 'Unusual' could quickly identify all the anomalous articles in the sample. A number was attached to each headline before it was imported into Atlas Ti, showing the page and date of the article to which it referred.[13] The lists of articles Atlas Ti produced therefore made it easier to ascertain any development within a particular narrative over time, and whether or not it regularly appeared in conjunction with other types of narrative or event.

The codes had to represent all the individual newspapers' themes and functions, while having a sufficiently generalised meaning to be applicable to most or all of the newspapers, and therefore appropriate for use in a comparative content analysis. The introductory newspaper reading in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) helped to formulate preliminary lists of codes, which were refined as the newspaper headlines were read and formatted in preparation for the analysis. The codes were created by inventing a name to describe the repeated themes,

[13] For example, the number 01-01-02 refers to the second article on the first page of the *Yakutia* edition published on the first of June.

functions and genres that had been identified during the first and second readings, or a word to stand for the concept or type of article that needed to be quantified or marked for a later reading – such as the code 'Sakha Cultural Practice', which was attached to all the articles that appeared to manifest Sakha culture. The names used to describe the newspaper content were kept as close to the theme or function they concerned as possible, sometimes by using a Russian word that often appeared in conjunction with a given theme or genre. For example, the code 'Torzhestvennoye Sobytiye' uses the Russian for 'ceremonial occasion' (*torzhestvennoye sobytiye*), and referred to a particular type of public communications event, usually sponsored by local government or business, which generated common article genres in both government and commercial newspapers.

The lists of codes were adapted slightly during the early stages of the analysis, either by removing unnecessary codes, or by adding the codes that were needed to reflect the newspaper's content accurately. Each newspaper had its own list, made up of between sixty and seventy different codes, all of which were needed either for the content analysis, or to help with the discourse analysis.[14] The aim was to keep these lists as repetitive as possible, in order to retain their capacity to show relative differences between the newspapers; however, the newspaper content varied to such an extent that using the same list of codes would have distorted the analysis. There were themes and functions that formed an integral part of some newspapers, but were irrelevant to others. For example, the commercial newspapers usually aimed to attract readers by stimulating an intimate, personal attachment to the article subjects or to the

[14] Please see Appendix Two for examples of these code lists (it presents the lists of codes used on *Yakutia* and *Inform Polis*).

journalists themselves. The code ‘Human Interest’ marked the appearance of this strategy, and was often attached to more articles in a given newspaper sample than any other code, apart from ‘Information’. However, the government newspaper *Buryatia* did not employ this technique at all, and therefore its analysis did not require the code ‘Human Interest’, as Chapter Three explains.

Codes were subject to revision, and it was occasionally necessary to create adapted versions of specific codes, to suit the newspapers’ varying formulations of similar ideas. Short lists of codes were created for the editions of daily and non-Russian newspapers that were not coded in detail, in order to identify relevant, typical or strikingly unusual articles, which could have indicated a fundamental change in the newspaper’s content.

Extensive notes were made on the codes themselves as part of the discourse analysis, recording each newspaper’s different formulation of the theme or function they denoted. These changes in meaning did not however affect their use in the content analysis: the generalised theme or function to which they referred had to be constant, otherwise the code was changed or discarded. For example, the material presented by *Yakutsk Vecherniy* as ‘information’ did not have the clarity, detail or rigour of *Nashe Vremya*’s ‘informative’ articles, and was often intended less to inform than to arouse the reader. However, its presentation showed that it was intended to be taken as ‘information’ by the reader, whether or not the reader paid any attention to its substance. It constituted the informative speech acts that could occur within the parameters imposed by *Yakutsk Vecherniy*’s main product, and therefore required the ‘Information’ code.

The later stages of the discourse analysis clarified these newspapers' main narratives, along with their circumstances and motivations, through the close reading of the articles identified using Atlas Ti. The discourse analysis was not limited to the news sections: articles from the entire editions published over both sample periods were interpreted in detail in every case, if they were particularly good examples of an important narrative. References to the Buryat and Sakha were noted and interpreted throughout the analysis process, so that an understanding of these discourses could develop in tandem with an understanding of the Republics and their newspapers.

Another technique – useful in understanding the more complex and ambiguous narrative elements – was a system of memo headings, which were attached to the relevant articles. For example, notes made on one recurring narrative in *Yakutia* were headed 'ordinary citizen'. This meant that they were stored together in the memo file, and so could be read consecutively. The memos helped the recognition of repetitions of narrative, which could then be compared with earlier examples. Codes, combinations of codes and memos could be used in the same way to record the appearance of important current events, in order to relate them to repeated narratives. For example, the code 'Beslan' identified all the articles published about the hostage taking in North Ossetia. These various types of identification made it possible to navigate around the combinations of narrative and event each newspaper contained, enabling an increased understanding of the newspaper's central narratives, and their interaction with its representation of current events. Comparing the ways in which different newspapers represented the same key event revealed their

distinguishing characteristics still further, in addition to providing useful insights into the event itself and its circumstances.

Finally, repeated readings of the articles about the Buryat and Sakha enabled me to interpret their narratives according to my knowledge of their newspapers and context, in order to understand both the assumptions their producers were making about their audiences, and the possible audience responses. The analysis as a whole revealed networks of ideas about the Buryat and Sakha in their Republics' public discourse, generated both for political and commercial reasons. The ideas themselves and the way they were used had clear implications for the republican and federal political establishments, as Chapters Four and Six show.

Chapter Three:

Local newspapers and politics in the Republic of Buryatia

Introduction:

This chapter is concerned with describing the main narratives and functions of the newspapers selected for analysing the Buryat case, and what they show about the nature of Buryatia's political processes.[15] It examines the importance of public representation within the Republic of Buryatia's governance, given the difficulty of managing Buryatia's current economic and political climate. In doing so, this chapter presents a distinction between commercial and government-sponsored newspapers that occurs in both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia)**, arising from the varying demands different sponsors make on their editorial collectives.**

The following section of this chapter shows the differences a quantitative analysis of these newspapers revealed between the commercial and government-sponsored newspapers, before using a qualitative analysis of the newspaper discourse to explore this distinction in greater detail. The second section

[15] As Chapter Two explained, the newspapers chosen for the study of Buryatia are *Buryatia* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, owned by the republican executive and Barguzin sub-region's administration respectively, and the commercial newspapers *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*. The samples of each newspaper consisted of the editions published during June, 2004, and between August 25 and September 22, 2004. However, only the June sample of *Buryatia* was subjected to a quantitative analysis, since *Buryatia* is a daily rather than a weekly, and thus produced a much larger volume of material.

discusses what the interpretation of this newspaper material reveals about daily life and political activity in contemporary Buryatia. **Both sections incorporate a comparison with some 1989 editions of the Soviet newspaper *Pravda Buryatii*, illustrating the continuities between Soviet and post-Soviet strategy and practice.**[16]

Section 3.1: The difference in function between government and commercial newspapers

The quantitative analysis method consisted of attaching codes representing specific themes or discursive functions to the newspaper articles, as described in Chapter Two. Table 3.1 presents the six 'function codes' used most often during the coding of the articles in *Buryatia*, *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*. The quantitative analysis incorporated several 'function codes', referring to the newspaper articles' different purposes; for example, articles designed to celebrate an occasion or person were marked with the codes 'Celebration', or 'Celebration of Person'. 'Ceremonial Occasion' (from the Russian *torzhestvennoye sobytyye*) identified the articles publicising public events. The code 'Cultural creativity' (*kul'turnoye tvorchestvo*) was attached to articles that offered cultural production, through either the description of cultural events or the presentation of creative, as a opposed to informative, writing. **As the use of Russian in these code names might suggest, the ceremonial occasions or cultural production sometimes took forms that are specific to the post-Soviet space.** The codes 'Information', 'Useful Information' and 'Human Interest' were attached to articles offering information, specifically

[16] I would like to thank Caroline Humphrey for sharing this material.

useful information, or a pleasant emotional drama. 'Appeal' (*obraschenie*) referred to general requests for money or action, whether made by individuals, businesses, government organisations or charities – while the more assertive demands marked as 'Demand on Politician' were addressed to politicians in particular. Table 3.1 thus shows the six most commonly occurring functions in each newspaper.[17]

The six most frequently used function codes						
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Buryatia (*N* = 371, June sample only)	Celebration 52.3 (194)	Information 48.0 (177)	Cultural Creativity 36.0 (133)	Ceremonial Occasion 31.0 (115)	Celebration of Person 19.0 (70)	Appeal 12.0 (43)
Barguzinskaya Pravda (*N* = 218)	Ceremonial Occasion 30.3 (66)	Celebration 25.7 (56)	Cultural Creativity 22.9 (50)	Information 18.8 (41)	Celebration of Person 16.1 (35)	Appeal 14.7 (32)
Inform Polis (*N* = 298)	Information 47.3 (141)	Human Interest 43 (128)	Celebration 24.2 (72)	Cultural Creativity 19.8 (59)	Ceremonial Occasion 11.0 (34)	Useful Information 8.4 (25)
Pyatnitsa Plyus (*N* = 75)	Information 64.0 (48)	Cultural Creativity 33.3 (25)	Human Interest 26.7 (20)	Useful Information 25.3 (19)	Appeal 15.0 (11)	Demand on Politician 11.0 (8)

Table 3.1: Percentages of articles coded with common functions (the figures in brackets are the number of articles coded; *N* = the number of articles in the sample)

These figures reveal the variance in news agenda between Buryatia's privately and government-owned newspapers, resulting from the different uses

[17] A single article could have more than one function, and therefore could be marked with more than one function code. This is why the percentages in the table do not add up to 100.

they have for their sponsoring organisations. There were roughly twice as many promotions of public events in the government newspapers. 'Ceremonial Occasion' was attached to 31 per cent of the articles in *Buryatia*'s sample, 30.3 per cent of *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s, but to 11 and 7.8 per cent respectively of the *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus* articles. The high proportions of articles marked 'Ceremonial Occasion' in the government newspaper samples correspond with the dominance of the 'Celebration' function: this was the most commonly occurring article function in *Buryatia*, and the second most commonly occurring function in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*. The frequent use of these two codes during the coding process shows that the government newspapers' main function was to publicise and celebrate prominent events. It indicates the importance of a previously organised timetable of political or cultural occasions in determining the government papers' news agendas, a timetable which takes precedence over the reporting of contingent events; it is clear that these newspapers' informative function is subservient to the communication they are making on behalf of their sponsors. Similarly, the high proportion of articles marked 'Information' in *Buryatia* (48 per cent) consisted largely of informative pieces about timetabled public occasions or political activities, rather than reports on current events.

In contrast to the government newspapers, the most commonly used function codes for the commercial newspapers were 'Information', followed by 'Human Interest' (in *Inform Polis*), and 'Cultural Creativity' (in *Pyatnitsa Plyus*). *Inform Polis*' sample contained a large proportion (24.2 per cent) of 'Celebration' articles. However, the majority of its articles aimed to offer their readers 'Information', 'Human Interest' or 'Cultural Creativity', as did those

published in *Pyatnitsa Plyus*. The conclusion is that for both these commercial newspapers providing their paying audiences with an attractive publication takes precedence over communicating a politically expedient message.

The frequency with which the codes 'Economic Crisis' and 'Political *Aktsiya*' (see Table 3.2) were used on the government newspapers indicates their emphasis on positive political action. These codes refer to the articles' subject matter, rather than their function. 'Economic Crisis' was attached to articles about a problem caused by a lack of money, while 'Political *Aktsiya*' was attached to articles on an event or initiative explicitly intended for political communication: the Russian word for such events is *aktsiya*. Table 3.2 shows the proportion of articles marked with these codes.

Code	*Buryatia* (*N* = 371)	*Barguzinskaya Pravda* (*N* = 218)	*Inform Polis* (*N* = 298)	*Pyatnitsa Plyus* (*N* = 75)
Economic Crisis	9.4 (35)	8.7 (19)	11 (33)	33.3 (25)
Political *Aktsiya*	24 (89)	5.0 (11)	8.4 (25)	16 (12)

Table 3.2: Percentages of newspaper articles marked with the codes 'Economic Crisis' and 'Political *Aktsiya*' (the figures in brackets are the number of articles coded; *N* = the number of articles in the sample)

In their coverage of serious news, the commercial newspapers contain more articles on economic crises than on political initiatives – unlike *Buryatia*, which

contains a high proportion (24 per cent) of articles on political *aktsii*, and a relatively low proportion (9.4 per cent) of articles on economic crises. This contrast indicates a decision on the part of *Buryatia*'s editors to concentrate on the positive initiatives of the Republic's politicians, rather than on their region's economic difficulties.

The discussion of economic crises in all the newspapers shows that lack of money is an all-pervasive problem in Buryatia, particularly in agricultural sub-regions like Barguzin. **This corroborates the complaints I heard throughout my fieldwork about Buryatia's poor economy.** *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s references to economic crises reveal the extent of Barguzin region's post-Soviet economic breakdown. One article describes the poor state of Barguzin's milk production, after the electrical supply to the milk processing plant had been cut due to the non-payment of bills; a 'mini' milk processing plant had been brought in from another area, but there was no money to repair it (*Barguzinskaya Pravda* June 21, 2004: p. 1). Another piece mentions that 900 out of Barguzin town's 6,500 inhabitants are unemployed (*Barguzinskaya Pravda* June 21, 2004: p. 1). Similarly, the low proportion of 'Political *Aktsiya*' articles in *Barguzinskaya Pravda* (5.0 per cent) is likely to reflect a lack of funds on the part of the regional administration, which prevents the undertaking of political initiatives. Barguzin Region's administration, in tandem with *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, uses instead frequent celebrations to cheer and divert their population, as the dominance of 'Celebration' and 'Ceremonial Occasion' articles in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s sample shows. *Buryatia*'s emphasis on celebratory descriptions of political initiatives also creates a positive impression of the Republic's economic and political wellbeing. It is notable that neither

newspaper is primarily concerned with seeking out information relevant to their audiences' daily experience.

Buryatia's positive spin contrasts with *Pyatnitsa Plyus*' preoccupation with economic crisis, revealed by the frequent occurrence (33.3 per cent) of 'Economic Crisis' articles in its sample. *Pyatnitsa Plyus* is directed towards the 'average citizen' rather than the elites, as its small size (eight broadsheet pages) and low price (3 rubles, as opposed to *Inform Polis*'s 10) show. The last four pages of every edition of *Pyatnitsa Plyus* are devoted to a supplement for kitchen-gardeners, designed for those who in part depend on the produce they grow: kitchen gardening has become increasingly important as a means of economic survival in post-Soviet Russia (Humphrey, 1998).[18] The high proportion of 'Useful Information' articles (25.3 per cent, in Table 3.1) and 'Economic Crisis' references also reflect the emphasis by *Pyatnitsa Plyus* on providing information of direct practical use to a low-income target audience.

Pyatnitsa Plyus displays a more irreverent attitude towards the political establishment than *Inform Polis*, as the unusually high occurrence of 'Demand on Politician' articles (11 per cent, in Table 3.1) indicates. It took the risk of publishing a damaging article from the Moscow-based newspaper *Izvestiya*, which described the arrest of the President of Buryatia's spokesman Andrei Kapustin for taking bribes, and his subsequent death in prison under suspicious circumstances (*Pyatnitsa Plyus* September 1, 2004: p. 2). It is interesting that while *Pyatnitsa Plyus* regards this sort of scandal as publishable news, at other times it toes the officially acceptable line: for example, like *Inform Polis* it contained no comment on Vladimir Putin's decision to abolish the election of

[18] These pages were not included in the newspaper analysis.

regional heads, following the obedient example set by *Buryatia*'s statement of support for this measure (*Buryatia* September 16, 2004: p. 1). *Pyatnitsa Plyus* could be compromising a commercial requirement to adapt its content to an audience which suspects elite politicians and businessmen, with the need to maintain a positive working relationship with influential political actors. The higher incidence of irreverent or scandalous articles in *Pyatnitsa Plyus* suggests that its journalists perceive a lower level of political surveillance than *Inform Polis*' producers, understanding both the newspaper and its audience to be sufficiently detached from the political establishment to make occasional damaging articles irrelevant. **I had noticed a similar phenomenon in Irkutsk: the publishing house SM Nomer Odin's cheapest tabloid *Pyatnitsa* contained the strongest criticism of the political status quo, in well-written analysis pieces. When I put this to a well-connected Irkutsk media academic, he mentioned that the regional political elites would probably consider both *Pyatnitsa* and its low-status target audience to be too lacking in political agency to be worth serious attention.**

Inform Polis' content shows it to be making a similar compromise, although with a different, higher-status target audience in mind. *Inform Polis* covers the same republican-, federal- and international-level political and economic issues as *Buryatia*, as the similar occurrence of the codes 'Foreigners' and 'Federal Level' shows. These codes were attached to articles on events or issues that concerned the Russian Federation as a whole, or other countries. The proportions of articles to which these codes were attached are presented in Table 3.3.

Code	*Buryatia* (*N* = 371)	*Barguzinskaya Pravda* (*N* = 218)	*Inform Polis* (*N* = 298)	*Pyatnitsa Plyus* (*N* = 75)
Federal Level	25.3 (94)	10.6 (23)	24.2 (72)	29.3 (22)
Foreigners	15 (57)	5.0 (11)	17.4 (52)	11 (8)
Agriculture	5.7 (21)	9.6 (21)	1.7 (5)	4.0 (3)

Table 3.3: Percentages of articles marked with the codes 'Federal Level', 'Foreigners' and 'Agriculture' (the figures in brackets are the number of articles coded; *N* = the number of articles in the sample)

The codes 'Federal level' and 'Foreigners' were attached to 25.3 and 15 per cent respectively of *Buryatia*'s articles, and to 24.2 and 17.4 per cent of *Inform Polis*'. The similarity of these figures reflects *Inform Polis*' probable orientation towards the professionals, government officials and businessmen who also read *Buryatia*. *Inform Polis* provides these groups with information on Russian and world events which *Buryatia* represents through the prism of its political communication.

Pyatnitsa Plyus contained a greater proportion of 'Federal Level' articles than either *Buryatia* or *Inform Polis* (29.3 per cent), since a large part of its space is devoted to articles taken from Moscow-based commercial newspapers. The low proportion of 'Foreigners' articles (11 per cent) reflects its emphasis on covering the Russian Federation's immediate concerns, whereas *Inform Polis* contained regular digests of high-quality foreign news sources, such as the

Financial Times, revealing its editors' orientation towards a target audience with the time and education required for an interest in the wider world.

Inform Polis also identifies itself as a 'high-quality' newspaper through its commitment to the professional practices considered to be the mark of 'high-quality' journalism. For example, when it publishes articles paid for by a business or politician these appear in a different font, unlike all the other commercial newspapers used in this study. It has also made the effort to create an accessible style of news reporting, adopting the technique (normal in Western newspapers) of summarising a news story in its first paragraph.[19] *Inform Polis* uses repetitive language to create recognizable 'styles' of article, which are published on similar pages from week to week. For example, the *Inform Polis* editions usually contained an 'accident' (*proisshestviya*) section on pages eight and nine, containing shocking crime or accident stories. By contrast, *Pyatnitsa Plyus* has not worked out a consistent set of compact narrative techniques, using a verbose linguistic style instead of attracting the reader's attention through the succinct communication of striking information. Textbox 3.1 compares the headlines and introductory paragraphs of news stories from *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*.

[19] As I discovered during my own journalism training, journalists in the UK are taught to write 'pyramid' news stories, encapsulating the point of the story in the first few lines, and putting progressively less important information into the succeeding paragraphs.

Inform Polis	*Pyatnitsa Plyus*
Headline: A corner of Manchuria will be built in Ulan Ude	**Headline:** It could have been worse
Introductory paragraph: The Chinese will build a residential micro-region and commercial centre in Ulan Ude, using their own money, and in their national style. The capital's municipality is prepared to allocate the best land allotments to the 'Heavenly Land's' businessmen's project (*Inform Polis* June 2 2004: p. 4.)	**Introductory paragraph:** At the latest meeting of the members of the Town Council, changes and additions were made to the town's main financial document. Despite their incredible efforts (as the Council members themselves evaluated their work on the budget), they did not escape a deficit of ten percent. The people's elected representatives tried to preserve the financing of the important social welfare stipulations to the maximum. (*Pyatnitsa Plyus* June 2, 2004: p. 1.)

Textbox 3.1: A comparison of *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*

The rest of the *Inform Polis* article presents further details about the Chinese businessmen's proposal, and their meeting with Ulan Ude's municipal administration – while the *Pyatnitsa Plyus* article continues into a discursive account of the council meeting, touching on the various issues it raised.

Inform Polis's professionalism extends to helping its readers by exposing and criticising damaging elite activity. Its willingness to take risks in informing its audience can be seen in its presentation of foreign news sources. For example, it published foreign articles criticising Putin's policy in Chechnya after the Beslan hostage siege (*Inform Polis* September 8, 2004: p. 15). On the other hand, it also publishes articles (similar to those in *Buryatia*) which promote either elite figures or the official version of events. The tone is optimistic, with a lower proportion of 'Economic Crisis' articles than *Pyatnitsa Plyus* (11 per cent, as opposed to 33.3 per cent), and a higher proportion of 'Celebration' pieces (24.2 per cent, as opposed to 7.0 per cent), indicating a generally upbeat attitude likely to be acceptable to Buryatia's ruling classes. Like *Pyatnitsa Plyus*, *Inform Polis* is carefully balancing its target audience's desires against the interests of Buryatia's leading politicians, who themselves form part of *Inform Polis*' readership.

The government newspapers also display the priority of their political functions by publishing articles written in a demanding official jargon, which even the native Russian-speakers I interviewed found tedious and difficult to read. For example, the following quotations are the headlines and first paragraphs from two such articles:

Buryatia	*Barguzinskaya Pravda*
Headline: The reform of local government has been brewing for some time… : The Vice-Chairman of the National Parliament of the Republic of Buryatia I. I. Kalashnikov describes the legal provision made by the organs of government power of the reforms of local government, and the execution of the measures taken during the transition period in the Republic of Buryatia.	**Headline:** Salary – on time!
First paragraph: The main aim of the conference was the consolidation of the efforts of the organs of government power to enact the stipulations of the new edition of the federal law "About the general principles of the organisation of local government in the Russian Federation". (*Buryatia* June 22, 2004: p. 3.)	**First paragraph:** And so, a verification of the execution of the employment legislation, about the punctual payment of salaries, was done by the procurator of the region at Barguzin's STK ROSTO. The fact of the violation of the dates for salary payment at the institution was established by the verification. This institution has been in debt over salary payment since the start of the year (*Barguzinskaya Pravda* June 17, 2004: p. 3.).

Text box 3.2: A comparison of *Buryatia* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda*

Buryatia's use of this style makes it unlikely to have much attraction or relevance for those who are not the academic, military, cultural, economic or political professionals who require this type of information. **Indeed, many Ulan Ude residents described *Buryatia* as boring. It was never recommended to**

me as a 'high quality' political newspaper, unlike Sakha (Yakutia)'s equivalent, *Yakutia*.

In Textbox 3.2, the variation between *Buryatia* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda* arises out of the difference between the two communities within which these two newspapers operate. *Barguzinskaya Pravda* contained a higher proportion of articles marked with the code 'Agriculture' than *Buryatia* (9.6 per cent, as opposed to 5.7 per cent), and lower proportions of articles marked 'Federal Level', and 'Foreigners' (10.6 and 5.0 per cent respectively, instead of 25.3 and 15 per cent). This contrast is an indication of *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s concern with Barguzin Region's schools, government offices, factories and farms, rather than federal- or international-level current affairs.

The content of *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, as a sub-regional newspaper, indicates that rural and agricultural communities have a much closer relationship with their local administrations than the urban population. A report of a meeting between Barguzin town's municipal administration and citizenry describes the complaints made by elderly inhabitants of Barguzin town about their town's poor sanitation, before attacking the younger attendees for not participating enough (*Barguzinskaya Pravda* June 21, 2004: p. 1). The journalist's comments about the meeting reveal their expectation that Barguzin's ordinary citizens should interact directly with the sub-region's administration, making their concerns known. *Barguzinskaya Pravda* itself facilitates this interaction, publishing letters of complaint from local residents in addition to making critical comments in its political reports. These criticisms can be sharp, although they never went as far as to suggest that the political establishment as a whole was ineffective. For example, the report described above expressed a hope that "the

decisions taken don't stay on paper, and that we won't have to talk at the next conference about the same thing for the tenth time [*po desyatomu krugu*]." It was notable that *Barguzinskaya Pravda* published the *Izvestiya* article on Kapustin's death appearing in *Pyatnitsa Plyus*, unlike *Buryatia* (*Barguzinskaya Pravda* September 6, 2004: p. 6). ***Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s complaints resemble the forthright criticisms published by 1989 editions of *Pravda Buryatii*, indicating the continuation of a Soviet-era belief in the critical function of print journalism. For example, the director of the Uoyan state collective farm in the north of Buryatia claims that the Ministry in charge of building the village Noviy Uoyan (New Uoyan) is deliberately ignoring the fact that ten thousand people are living in a settlement designed for three thousand: "Of course, it's much easier to feign ignorance than recognise the tangle of Uoyan's problems." (*Pravda Buryatii* February 7, 1989: p. 1.)**

The different techniques the government and commercial newspapers use to entertain their audiences further illustrate their contrasting relationships with their readers. They reveal the commercial newspapers' greater willingness to engage with their audience members' daily experience in order to create the sympathetic emotional relationship that attracts and sustains a mass readership. As Table 3.1 shows, the 'Human Interest' code was attached to 43 and 26.7 per cent of *Inform Polis*' and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*' articles respectively; strikingly, it was not needed at all for coding the government newspapers. 'Human interest' is a technique for providing a pleasurable emotional experience, through dramatic accounts of 'ordinary' life that stimulate an emotional relationship between the

reader and the story's subjects. Its success depends on the capacity of the journalist to present narratives to which the audience will relate.

The quotation from *Inform Polis* below shows how human interest can be introduced into a current affairs story, in this case about Ulan Ude's energy shortage:

> Last Friday, the seventeen-year-old Zhenya Sagaleyeva, from the village of Zarechnogo, started to iron her dress for the school-leavers' evening party three times, and three times had to lay down the iron: the micro-region's electricity cut out literally every two hours. The girl only managed to arrange her outfit and do her hair by five o' clock. The holiday mood was spoiled (*Inform Polis* June 23, 2004: p. 3.)

A reader is likely to sympathise with Zhenya's frustration, particularly since a school-leaver's end-of-year party in Russia is a highly charged public ceremony, marking a young person's initiation into adult life. Many of *Inform Polis*' readers are likely to have endured similar situations themselves, given the poor state of heating, electricity and hot water supplies in post-Soviet Buryatia. Zhenya's story immediately generates an emotional response, combining a personal sympathy for Zhenya with the irritation aroused by the reader's own memories of electricity shortages, and engaging the reader's interest in the article that follows. The photograph accompanying the article, shown in Figure 3.1 on the page opposite, adds to the poignancy. The paragraph eventually resolves the crisis it presents – Zhenya did manage to get ready in time – stimulating the reader's relief and satisfaction on her behalf, even as they turn to the rest of the article with a feeling of indignation towards those responsible for the situation as a whole. The article's writer has used what they know to be a

common experience to create an emotionally engaging mini-drama. The commercial newspapers' frequent publication of 'human interest' articles shows the influence their audiences' perceived emotional reactions have over their content.

The government newspaper material lacked this emotional engagement with its audience, being (as already noted) a political act rather than an attempt to attract a paying readership. This political purpose requires government-sponsored journalists to present a politically expedient version of Buryatia's reality, rather than interpreting their audiences' everyday lives. When government newspaper articles do seek to entertain they resort to self-consciously literary creative writing, rather than dramatic narratives about 'ordinary people'. *Buryatia* in particular made much use of this technique, as the high proportion (36 per cent, in Table 3.1) of its articles marked 'Cultural Creativity' indicates. *Pyatnitsa Plyus* also produced a high proportion (33.3 per cent) of 'Cultural Creativity' articles; however, the common occurrence of the codes 'Human Interest' (26.7 per cent) and 'Useful Information' (25.3 per cent) show that it combined references to cultural production with the emotionally engaging drama described above, or information with an explicit use for its target audience.

The following quotation is an example of *Buryatia*'s creative writing, the headline and first paragraph from an account of a trip to an academic conference in Tashkent:

Headline: In the burial-vault of Tamerlane

> **First paragraph:** The main point of the tour's programme was a visit to the mausoleum and burial vault Gur-Emir, which was of interest to Ivan Aleksandrovich and myself as a unique monument to ancient eastern architecture; as the burial vault of the legendary astronomer and mathematician Ulugbek, and as the burial vault of Tamerlane – the great conqueror and creator of old Samarkand. (*Buryatia* June 24, 2004: p. 8.)

As this quotation illustrates, *Buryatia*'s literary narratives are located in places and times set apart from 'ordinary' daily existence – whether these are ceremonial political or cultural occasions, tours outside the Republic, or forays into history or the natural world. Their depiction of emotion is incorporated into their political communication, so that their subjects' or authors' emotional responses display idealised personalities rather than spontaneous subjective reactions. The excitement and erudition the author of this article and his companion manifest over Gur-Emir is typical of *Buryatia*'s idealised creative personality. Their fascination with and knowledge of the mysteries of past cultural traditions displays their high moral and intellectual quality, distinguishing them from the mass of ordinary human beings absorbed in everyday life. **The preoccupation with glorious past tradition, combined with the higher moral status attributed to those sharing this preoccupation, reflect a Soviet-era understanding of the Russian word for culture, *kul'tura*. As Chapter One describes, *kul'tura* came to mean a series of idealised cultural traditions (Grant, 1995). Reportage of the traditional Buryat *Sagaalgan* holiday published in a 1989 edition of *Pravda Buryatii* also emphasised the holiday's ancient origin, its display of "universal human feelings and wishes" for the good of humanity, and the enthusiasm and good nature of its participants (*Pravda Buryatii* February 11, 1989: p. 4).**

The place of such narratives in *Buryatia*'s government legitimisation strategy is discussed fully in Chapter Four.

The authors of *Buryatia*'s creative pieces write as if they assumed their readers were equally devoted to their ideals: they present them without justification or explanation. In doing so, these writers flatter their readers by implying them to belong to the circle of those who are committed to high moral values. Their linguistic style provides an aesthetic pleasure explicitly orientated towards individuals who are sufficiently educated to have an appreciation for high quality literary language. The pleasure these articles afford relies on a mutual regard for high-level cultural production between journalist and reader, rather than on exciting common emotions – limiting their attraction to the minority of citizens who share these journalists' education and values.

As this content analysis has shown, each of the newspapers sampled offers a distinct product or service, although as we have seen some of them could have overlapping readerships. Above all, the nature of their output is determined by their ownership. The government-owned newspapers function as an extension of the political organs, while the privately owned newspapers are commercial businesses. **The requirement for commercial newspapers to respond to their target audiences' needs and interests is manifested in the way commercial newspapers have adapted western and Soviet-era article genres into an attractive product, rather than perpetuating Soviet-era forms, as have the government-sponsored newspapers.** These newspapers complement each other in this investigation, since official representations of 'ethnicity' can be compared with those intended to please a mass audience, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Section 3.2 Public faces and private realities in the Republic of Buryatia

Section 3.2.1: The republican government's political communication

As the previous section discussed, the government newspapers in particular contained a large number of articles reporting on public ceremonial events. These occasions were recreational, cultural or academic – for example, the Russian-German forum organised by Buryatia's State University and the Minister of Education – or they were integral parts of the Republic's legislative processes, such as policy discussion meetings. The event itself is covered in tandem with pieces on the political or social issues related to it. For example, the pieces covering the celebration of the Day for the Defence of Children were accompanied by a report on Buryatia's children's homes (*Buryatia* June 1, 2004: pp 4–5). The state holidays could be a form of state-sponsored recreation for some, particularly in rural areas with few entertainment providers.

The list of "main undertakings of the regional administration and its departments during June 2004", published in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, shows them all to be public occasions of one kind or another, whether meetings between the regions' citizens and politicians, or state holidays such as 'Day of the Social Worker' – indicating that the organisation of ceremonial occasions is conceived of as one of the government's duties. (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 10, 2004: p. 2). The republican executive's activities also involve a high proportion of cultural and official occasions, according to the weekly summary

in *Buryatia* (*Buryatia* June 29, 2004: p. 2). For example, President Potapov's activities from 21 to 26 June 2004 included attending four academic events, a concert, a visit to a vodka factory, and a discussion about a training centre for the Russian Federation's Olympic contenders.

The reporting of these occasions tends to follow a formula. A political figure will almost always be mentioned as being present, thus clarifying the nature of the political patronage the event has received. The propaganda function, which always coexists with the occasion's ostensible purpose, lies in the public demonstration of the energy and enthusiasm of its patrons, and of their commitment to the ideals that officially motivate their organisations. These together present positive impressions of the Republic's current circumstances, which correspond to ideals frequently expressed in other articles. For example, *Buryatia*'s coverage of the State University's International Russian-German Forum celebrates the academics and politicians who organised it, its participants, and the existence of the German Department itself (*Buryatia* June 3, 2004: p. 3). These are taken as a sign of Buryatia's rich academic and cultural heritages, its cosmopolitanism, and its astute and energetic regional and federal politicians: as *Buryatia* points out, the creation of friendly relations with Germany will help Russia's economy. As Chapter Four describes in detail, *Buryatia* constantly associates traditional cultural production and academia with high moral value. It thus espouses a set of ideals, while using events such as the Russian-German Forum to demonstrate that they correspond to Buryatia's reality.

The propaganda function is less marked in the coverage of political meetings, where the reporting takes a matter-of-fact tone. Reports may contain careful, although sharp, criticism of elite figures, especially in *Barguzinskaya*

Pravda. However in sum they demonstrate the good will, energy and professionalism of the politicians. Naturally, the politicians' speeches stress the positive initiatives the politician has made, in addition to their personal goals and ideals. For example, Barguzin's regional head mentions his general aspiration to create a better connection between the administration and the citizenry, in tandem with his specific intention to conduct a survey among the population on the type of administration leader they would like, and to introduce a system of elected representatives for every micro-region of Barguzin (*Barguzinskaya Pravda* June 21, 2004: p. 2). He raises a problem while suggesting a solution, thus demonstrating his own idealistic and committed personality.

These reports therefore imply that the solutions to Buryatia's problems are ultimately to be found in the present government – although ironically the solution often proposed is to leave the problem in the hands of the citizens. For example, the report of a meeting held in honour of President Potapov's visit to Barguzin sub-region claimed that the "human factor" is the "most important for the development of the region's economy", and that the "psychology" of the region's inhabitants must be changed to "overcome a dependent mood. [*izhdivencheskikh nastroyeniy*]" (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, September 16, 2004: pp. 1–3.)

The coverage of President Potapov's working trips forms a promotional genre in itself, which illustrates the qualities attributed to politicians in paradigmatic form. These articles illustrate *Buryatia*'s and *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s tendency to present repetitive narrative sequences espousing morals and ideals alongside reports of events or activities designed to show that the

political elites are committed to these morals. An example of one of these pieces can be found in Figure 3.2 on the opposite page. President Potapov is being conducted around the factories and government organisations of Barguzin town, as the pictures show. The representation of Potapov echoes the traditional Russian ideal of the 'good emperor' (*dobriy tsar'*), whose love for his people is always thwarted by the incompetent or criminal government officials (*chinovniki*) that surround him. Potapov is portrayed as deeply concerned with the citizenry's well-being. The reportage consistently mentions a moment when on his own initiative he departs from the planned tour to ask individual citizens about their problems, which he immediately takes steps to solve – for example, by promising two war veterans a car (*Buryatia* September 14, 2004: p. 3). His disinterested concern for his population's welfare shows him to correspond to the idealised moral personality constantly portrayed in *Buryatia*, which will be described in detail in Chapter Four. Similarly, *Buryatia*'s articles show that idealised conceptions of the politician involve a professional knowledge of economics and political science. *Buryatia*, as the officially recognised politicians' newspaper, enacts this ideal by publishing informative articles that are difficult even for those with a relatively advanced understanding of economics, such as the piece on local government presented in the previous section.

The contemporary use of Buryatia's government newspapers, together with the resources devoted to politicised public events, suggest that the attempt to merge reality with the ideologically appropriate representation is still regarded as an important aspect of government – hence the importance of state-sponsored occasions in the government-sponsored newspapers' news agenda.

The combination of public event and mass media coverage resembles the late Soviet use of public discourse described in Chapter One, which was designed to merge the description of an idealised reality in the mass media with the demonstration of its existence through a variety of institutional practices. **The articles from *Barguzinskaya Pravda* provide good examples of this communicative technique. They are written as if author, subject and audience behaved and evaluated according to the officially recognized Soviet norms. For example, a front-cover spread celebrates the personal success of Buryatia's leading milkmaids, with the following headlines:**

> **Top banner: The Republic's rally of leading milk farms opens in Ulan Ude today**
>
> **Headline: A warm welcome to the masters of high milk yields!**
>
> **Banner over photographs: Group leaders**
>
> **Feature headline: A beacon for farms (*Pravda Buryatii* February 17, 1989: p. 1.)**

The journalist takes the initiative in extending the warm welcome on behalf of their readers, as if they assume their readers will inevitably also be delighted by these milkmaids' achievements – as they would be, if they had the concern for their society that befits the idealized Soviet citizen. The following article contains a mixture of information about Buryatia's milk production, praise and criticism for the Republic's collective farms, and exhortations for all to increase their organization and commitment.

The article and the conference itself share a communicative aim, such that one becomes an extension of the other. They are the dual components of the important Soviet ritual described in Chapter One, the worker's holiday. The conference of the leading milk-producing farmers

and its coverage is part of a five-year plan (*pyatiletka*), aimed at increasing the Soviet Union's production. These five-year plans were part of Soviet life since Stalin launched the first in 1928. Workers in all sectors had to respond (if only superficially) to the demands for increased production. Meanwhile those not directly involved in production would have some ideologically defined role in supporting it – such as this journalist, who provides both positive and negative incentives (public praise or criticism) for collective farmers to work harder, at the same time as demonstrating the politically correct way of describing Buryatia's situation, including the milk shortage they were then experiencing. The conference and article together present a version of the Soviet Union's reality, in collaboration with the farm workers involved in the *pyatiletka*. These activities show the Soviet Union to be the kind of state where organisation, improvement and achievement are both possible and prioritized, at a time when the state was in reality at the point of collapse.

There is in fact a degree to which the activity of the Republic's current legislative and administrative organisation appears to be determined by the public demonstration of the morals and ideals these newspapers portray. **The various public holidays are not merely an effort to promote a convenient set of ideas about Buryatia's reality, as Caroline Humphrey describes, but can also exert a decisive influence over the way Buryatia's institutions function (Humphrey, 2007).** For example, according to both *Buryatia* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda,* the Republic's legislation and policy result from political meetings and scientific conferences which provide the politicians with the necessary information about the public's needs. The entire process apparently

takes place in the newspapers' public sphere – from the raising of citizens' concerns in public political meetings to the eventual publication of the law or policy in the newspaper. This correlates with the consistently expressed desire of the politicians to interact with and help the public. As the Vice-Chairman of the *Khural*'s Committee for Social Policy Konstantin Sobolev puts it: "The MP [*deputat*] is an initiator and motivator. ... But it's necessary not just to act, but to involve the population in the solving of problems, awakening their social activity. That's possible if you systematically inform the voter about your activities. My principle is simple: a *deputat* is a *deputat* to the extent that they resolve the mandates of the voters, and is accountable to them!" (*Buryatia*, June 10, 2004: p. 3).

Another illustration of the influence public representation has over administrative processes comes from *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, in the Procurator's report quoted in the previous section. These reports display the Procurator's efforts to enforce new legislation, describing the legislation itself, and a selection of cases where it has been applied. The latter paragraphs of this article present the strong penalties that can be incurred by breaking the law on salary payment, such as an 80,000 ruble (£1,724) fine, or imprisonment for up to two years (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, 17 June, 2004: p. 3). They highlight the Procurator's intention to find and prosecute those who are contravening the law by not paying their workers on time. However, the worst punishment the Procurator's office actually imposed was a fine of 700 rubles (£15), on a company that had been in debt to its workers for six months: the other offenders were given a "statement about the removal of the violation of the Russian Federation's employment legislation". A close reading of the article in fact

creates a negative impression of the Procurator's office, showing it to be strangely unwilling to exert the full force of the law in its effort to discourage the non-payment of salaries.

The non-payment of salaries continued: Ulan Ude's municipal organisations owed their employees 41.9 million rubles (about £838,000) in April 2006, which was 52 per cent of the entire sum of money then owed by Buryatia's employers.[20] These figures, and the report itself, raise the suspicion that Barguzin region's Procurator's office works under a strong imperative to legitimise its existence in the face of an inefficient legal system. It has adopted a legitimisation strategy that shows it to correspond with the ideal of an active politician or political organisation, which is keen on 'systematically informing' the general population, as Sobolev describes. The necessity of publishing an article as evidence of Barguzin Procurator's activity and eagerness to communicate, regardless of its content, has apparently taken precedence over presenting a carefully written and flattering account of its work. The public forms of policy-making and legislation are therefore to some extent determined by the motivation to demonstrate the elite's observance of the morals they espouse.

Throughout the sample the influence of the federal government on Buryatia was noticeable. The few major legislative initiatives mentioned in the sample were all a response to changes in federal policy. For example, articles in the August/September sample discuss the move to make the President and *Pravitel'stvo* Chairman separate positions, which is presented as being in accordance with the federal drive to strengthen the power vertical (*Buryatia*

[20] http://new.bol.ru/bol/news/10180.html: "*Na stolitsu Buryatii prikhoditsya 52% respublikanskoy dolzhnosti po zarplate*"; May 20, 2006.

September 3, 2004: p. 3). (This will not necessarily change the Republic's power hierarchy however, since the President will choose the *Pravitel'stvo* Chairman.) Other articles refer to the problems federal policy is about to cause regional administrations – in particular, the transfer of responsibility for social welfare payments from the federal budget to regional budgets (*Buryatia* June 23, 2004: p. 2). These pieces indicate that the republican government's capacity to effect change is hampered by its submission to the federal government.

In the absence of stable and effective legislative practices, and a marked improvement in Buryatia's economic position, the public representation of Buryatia's idealised polity must have an important role in maintaining the present power hierarchy. It sets the parameters within which communication between citizenry and the government has to occur, in addition to providing a version of reality that acts as a consistent resource of strategies for self-legitimisation. **The *Pravda Buryatii* articles indicate it to be the continuation of a resilient Soviet-era practice, and hence another example of the incremental transformation of Soviet society Humphrey examines in *The Unmaking of Soviet Life* (Humphrey, 2002).** The communities that read these newspapers and the newspapers themselves both participate in the public representation of the government of Buryatia – whether it be in helping to organise public holidays, or presenting reports at official meetings. This **collective** self-legitimisation is directed towards several audiences, from the federal government and potential foreign investors to the general population.

Section 3.2.2: Political practice and daily life

As we have seen, the commercial newspapers *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus* frame their material within a particular emotional engagement with an identified target audience. Their representations of the political sphere are constructed around their readers' perceived experiences of interacting with state and economic organizations. The material presented in this section shows how these newspapers' appeal rests on their capacity to help their readers cope with Buryatia's post-Soviet political and economic circumstances. The newspapers provide either helpful information on legislative processes and political events, or a way to resolve the negative emotions aroused by contemporary politics, or both. Buryatia's political and economic processes, as revealed by *Inform Polis*' and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*' strategies to attract readers, are characterised by the authoritarian conceptions of government implied by the '*dobriy tsar*' paradigm described in the previous section, combined with a lack of coherent policies.

Inform Polis aspires to raise its readers' mood, at the same time helping and encouraging them to adapt to post-Soviet circumstances. *Inform Polis* never attacks the governing system as such: its central message is that the informed citizen, willing to make an effort, can make the system work for them. The clearest statement of this appears in a repeated narrative genre describing how various ordinary people manage to overcome bureaucratic hurdles to attain their just demands. Nine of these pieces appeared in a sample of ten editions, indicating that *Inform Polis* regularly publishes these stories. They present attractive personal dramas alongside practical advice on how to go about achieving certain aims, likely to be of immediate use to *Inform Polis*'s readership. For example, readers are told how to establish their ownership of

houses built without the officially recognised permission, or how to install water meters (*Inform Polis* June 9, 2004: p. 6; *Inform Polis* June 30, 2004: p. 9). The judicial and bureaucratic systems come across as faulty, plagued in particular by inefficient *chinovniki*, but capable of delivering justice: again, the system itself is never questioned. This representation enables *Inform Polis* to criticise official activity without jeopardising its positive relationship with the political establishment.

Pyatnitsa Plyus takes a proactive line, encouraging readers to engage with the state, for example through trade unions. Trade union lawyers contribute answers to readers' legal questions, while in the sample studied there was an instance of a *Pyatnitsa Plyus* journalist participating in a trade union court case (*Pyatnitsa Plyus* September 15, 2004: p. 1). Like *Inform Polis*, *Pyatnitsa Plyus* implies that the legal system is essentially just, despite the damage done by unprofessional *chinovniki*. It thus remains within the boundaries of official political discourse, although the level of criticism it directs towards the elites precludes the close relationship *Inform Polis* has developed with the political sphere.

The attraction of *Pyatnitsa Plyus* is the quality of the relationship it offers between journalist and reader. It is a mediator between government and the citizenry, a provider of information, and a personal friend. One of its subscription advertisements carries the headline, “Friends don’t change over the years” (*Pyatnitsa Plyus* September 1, 2004: p. 1). The two leading journalists come across as distinct individuals: many of their articles are based on narrations of their personal experience. Reading these pieces is like listening to a friend chatting about their difficult day, and since the friend lives in the same

circumstances their frustrations are very pertinent to one's own life. The following quote is the first paragraph of an article about Ulan Ude's public bath houses:

> Last Sunday I went to the bath-house. They had turned off the water, but one wants to keep one's flesh clean. Heating water in pans and shivering in a cold bathroom is somehow unappealing. I rang round all the town's public bath-houses. It turned out that only three work. And so one morning I set off for one of them. I, and everyone who had just come into my bath section, were on the lookout. No, I wasn't looking for a tub, like Zoschenkov's character, and I didn't see how someone 'stood in one tub, washed their head in another, and held on to a third so that others didn't steal it'. Five people, baring all as nature made them, ran their eyes over the washing area, trying to solve the problem: where to settle one's backside. Tummies and legs were everywhere, there wasn't anywhere to sit. 'But standing up to wash – what kind of washing is that? It's sinful', I thought, exactly as Zoschenkov. (*Pyatnitsa Plyus*, June 9, 2004: p. 2.)

These articles afford the reader the satisfaction of feeling that their daily irritations can be publicly articulated, while suggesting that they have a helpful 'friend' and spokesperson in the public sphere.

The legal dimension of the negotiation between businesses, government bodies and individual citizens is well illustrated by the newspaper sample as a whole, and by *Inform Polis*' descriptions of court cases in particular. Legal language and procedures are shown to be one of the mediums through which bodies with conflicting interests conduct their struggles. Both laws and government policies are operated by means of definitions, which can be used in

various ways either to exert control, or to avoid acting against one's interests.[21] For example, *Inform Polis* covered a hunger strike by former builders of the Baikal-Amur Railway, who were campaigning for their village to be officially declared closed, so that they would receive housing certificates (*zhilischniye sertifikaty*) enabling them to return to central Russia. The administration of Mui region initially refused to give the strikers shelter and medical help, although they had spent several days lying in tents outside the administration in sub-zero temperatures: the administrators alleged the absence of the word 'hunger strike' (*golodovka*) in the federal legislation on striking and picketing meant that the strike was illegal (*Inform Polis* September 5, 2004: p. 5). The sample of *Buryatia* contained an article designed to ameliorate the damaging effects of another public protest, which corroborated *Inform Polis*' coverage of the Mui hunger strike. The inhabitants of Zagorsk village were demonstrating against the handover of their boiler-house to the Buryatenergo energy company, which would have left them vulnerable to large heating bill increases (*Buryatia* September 16, 2004: p. 3). *Buryatia* described the demonstration itself as illegal, since it was not officially registered: the lack of registration meant that the demonstration lay outside the sphere of officially recognized and hence legal activities.

Every organisation has to have an official legal definition in order to exist, while citizens have to go through various bureaucratic procedures in order to attain the definitions they need to go about their daily lives. For example, *Barguzinskaya Pravda* reminds Barguzin's private businessmen that in accordance with a federal law passed in 2003 they must re-register themselves at

[21]**An academic friend of mine in Moscow was emphatic in her agreement with this suggestion. In particular, she explained the bureaucratic hurdles that she believes have been deliberately designed to make the privatisation of housing more difficult.**

their local tax offices before the end of 2004, or they will lose the official status of 'individual businessman' (*individual'niy predprinimatel'*) which allows them legally to conduct their business (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 10, 2004: p. 2). Businesses and government organizations have an advantage over individuals, since they have legally established rights and responsibilities by virtue of having attained the official definition that ensures their existence. Federal and to a lesser extent republican legislative assemblies gain much of their power from this reliance on definition and procedure, since their role is to set the terms. *Inform Polis*' stories show how the government's control over legal definitions combines with the conflicting interests of various elite groups to create a situation where citizens are supplicants, even when trying to obtain what they are legally entitled to. Citizens have to spend large amounts of time and energy maintaining their positions with regard to the state's legal obligations, such as the payment of pensions. For example, one *Inform Polis* article describes how an elderly couple managed to legalise their ownership of their Soviet-built house (*dacha*) after four years (*Inform Polis* June 9, 2004: p. 6). During this time they were without the registered address (*podpiska*) required to secure various state services, such as medical treatment and pension payments. According to the article, legalising property ownership involves getting one kind of permission or another from five different organisations.

Not surprisingly, *Pyatnitsa Plyus* devotes large amounts of space to providing advice on bureaucratic and legal processes, in either its articles or the section Pyatnitsa – Konsul'tant. This section presents readers' questions next to answers provided by the relevant lawyers or officials. The questions asked show the extent to which citizens' lives are affected by complex and unfamiliar

bureaucratic practices – while the answers themselves exhibit these processes. The following quote is an example:

> **Headline**: A soldier's place of residence is kept, but not the subsidy.
>
> **Question:** Last year my grandson was conscripted, and since then they've started to take money from my daughter because of her superfluous living space. In fact my grandson isn't discharged, he's honourably doing his duty to his Motherland, but why should they take payment for superfluous living space? Or do they do that to everyone who has a son serving in the army? …
>
> **Answer:** The Vice-Minister of building, architecture and housing and communal services of the Republic of Buryatia Vladimir Kirillovich Badashkeyev answers:
> The place of residence is kept for your grandson from the time of his exit to the army. But since you get a subsidy, which is granted according to the social norm of the general space of accommodation, in this case it has to be counted according to the social norm for two people, which is in your case 42 square metres instead of 54 square metres. (*Pyatnitsa Plyus* June 23, 2004: p. 2.)

Inform Polis published a list of Buryatia's most powerful people, based on federation-wide research done by the Institute for Situational Analysis and New Technology, which showed that the Republic's political and economic elites overlap to the extent that they form a single group of powerful individuals (*Inform Polis* June 9, 2004: p. 5). *Inform Polis*' stories about the Republic's business organisations in relation to the government reveal the state's lack of control over its economy – as might be expected in a situation where politicians and businessmen have overlapping interests, which are subject to interference from powerful actors outside the Republic.

An extremely important item in the news agenda of both *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus* was Ulan Ude's 2004 summer energy crisis. At the end of May the energy company Buryatenergo ceased supplying hot water and electricity to various parts of Ulan Ude, in order to force the municipal company (*Munitsipal'noye Unitarnoye Predpriyatiye*, or *MUP*) in charge of collecting electricity payment to discharge a longstanding debt (*Inform Polis* September 1, 2004: p. 4). The municipal administration of Ulan Ude responded in June by leasing the town's energy network to the Moscow-based company Mezhregional'niy Energeticheskiy Soyuz, or MES, which as part of the deal was to take over the management of electricity payment. MES did nothing about the debt, apart from suggesting that the *MUP*s file for bankruptcy to avoid paying it, and its contract was dissolved after six weeks. MES' inability or unwillingness to cope with the problem it had taken on could have been predicted from the start: according to *Inform Polis*, Ulan Ude's Mayor agreed to MES' proposal even though it did not provide clear information about its financial backers. The Mayor's lack of rigour raises the suspicion that MES had made a previous arrangement with Ulan Ude's municipality – although *Inform Polis* does not refer directly to this possibility – in a collaboration between Moscow-based private businessmen and republican public officials.

The Mayor refused to give Buryatenergo control over Ulan Ude's *MUP*s, until President Potapov intervened at the end of August. The Mayor's reluctance to divest himself of this problem again raises suspicions: he could perhaps have been hoping to make another profitable leasing arrangement with a private company. Ulan Ude's *MUP*s were eventually leased to Buryatenergo. Buryatenergo meanwhile agreed to be put under the control of the federal

energy monopoly YeES Rossii, in return for its restructuring of the debt payments. This would give Buryatenergo direct control over the handling of revenues received from the public, effectively privatising what had been a state activity under the aegis of a powerful federal energy organization (*Inform Polis* September 1, 2004: p. 4).

Meanwhile, large parts of Ulan Ude were without hot water and sometimes electricity for most of the summer. It is impossible to understand from the newspapers why the *MUP*s were unable to pay their debts. *Inform Polis* emphasises the plight of citizens who had regularly paid for the electricity they weren't getting, while an article in *Buryatia* implies that the problem may stem from citizens who do not pay their bills on time (*Inform Polis* September 8, 2004: p. 9; *Buryatia* August 31, 2004: p. 4). **Humphrey has noted a persistent unwillingness on the part of the population to pay for their utilities – whether due to poverty, or a Soviet-era understanding that the state should provide them (Humphrey, 2007: p. 197).** Another *Inform Polis* article on a legal case involving the *MUP*s mentions in passing that Ulan Ude's *MUP*s did not know how many homes they were supplying, since an inventory had not been carried out for several years (*Inform Polis* September 15, 2004: p. 6). *Inform Polis* does not refer to the possibility of corruption in relation to this chain of events, describing it in neutral language, largely through statements made by the actors involved. It is framed by all the newspapers as a crisis occurring within and resolved by conventional interactions between businesses and government.

This chain of events implies federal private and state organisations to add another invasive layer of interests to those of Buryatia's elites. Although

Inform Polis does not overtly attack federal policies or businesses, federal actors can be shown to have a negative effect on the Republic, a view supported by comments received during fieldwork. For example, a small news piece states that Buryatia is due to receive a subsidy of 30 million rubles from the federal government, while the neighbouring Irkutsk *Oblast'* will receive 60 million rubles – even though Irkutsk *Oblast'* has had much more industrial development than Buryatia. Irkutsk *Oblast'*s power stations provide the electricity that Buryatia has to buy, since it lacks adequate power facilities of its own (*Inform Polis*, 25 August, 2004; p. 4). **Both the academics and journalists I spoke to in Irkutsk described this arrangement as a major source of resentment in Buryatia: the Republic has to pay high electricity tariffs to an already rich and powerful neighbour.**

Conclusion:

The Republic of Buryatia's newspapers indicate that the republican government's capacity to govern its territory effectively is limited. As *Buryatia* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda* show, the republican government tries to compensate through a combination of mass media coverage and public events, which allows politicians and government officials to act out the idealised roles and personalities they claim to embody.

The federal government appears to be taking advantage of the republican government's weak position. Potapov was replaced in 2007 by the Russian Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, who spent most of his career in Tomsk Region (*Oblast'*), and therefore does not have the personal ties with Buryatia or its citizens that might encourage him to sympathise with regionalist or Buryat

nationalist aspirations. The instatement of a pro-federal President could be a precursor to the disappearance of Buryatia itself, into a giant administrative region around Lake Baikal. Russians and Buryats in both Irkutsk and Ulan Ude spoke about this reorganisation, a prospect which the Buryat in particular dislike but see no possibility of being able to resist.

Chapter Four

Buryat ethnicity and political legitimisation

Introduction:

The contemporary versions of the Soviet-era notions of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic culture' appearing in the Republic of Buryatia's newspaper samples are quantified and interpreted in this chapter, in order to draw out their meaning and significance for the Republic's Buryat population and politicians. The first section presents the quantitative stage of this analysis, exploring the occurrence and influence of the ideas connected to ethnicity, Buryat ethnic identity and culture in the four newspapers subjected to content analysis (*Buryatia*, *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*). The second section discusses the role that the Buryat nationalist articles in *Buryatia* play in the republican government's self-legitimisation, while the third section presents the evidence from *Barguzinskaya Pravda* and *Inform Polis* to show that a distinct Buryat culture continues to develop in both urban and rural settings. This section ends with a discussion of the interrelationship between contemporary Buryat cultural development and the political communication narratives described in Section Two.

Section 4.1: The significance of popular Buryat ethnicity

The current understanding of ethnicity, nationality and statehood in the Russian Federation bears a Soviet influence: the task of this investigation is to identify and analyse contemporary versions of the Soviet-era notions associated with ethnic culture. In the Soviet Union the general term 'ethnic culture' referred to the culture associated with the various ethnic groups living on its territory. 'Ethnic groups' consisted of individuals who identified themselves with a particular pre-Soviet cultural tradition, such as the Buryat or Sakha. An ethnic identity was understood to be distinct from the various other identities an individual could hold, such as civic identity. As the initial reading of the newspapers showed, references to 'ethnicity' as an abstract concept are common in the Russian Federation, particularly in academic or high quality journalistic discourse.

The codes used to mark references to notions of 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic culture' were determined by the variation between the commercial and government-sponsored newspapers in both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), clear even at the first reading. The government newspaper articles consistently referred to abstracted concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic culture', which did not appear as distinctly in the commercial newspapers. 'Ethnicity' was used in the government newspapers to mark references to what the newspapers themselves would designate as 'ethnic' culture, while the code 'Super Ethnicity' was used for this purpose in the commercial newspapers. The codes 'Buryat Cultural Practice' and 'Russian Cultural Practice' were used for all the newspapers, to

mark instances of and references to specifically Russian or Buryat cultural practice.

'Super Ethnicity' was attached to articles that did not necessarily concern the concept of ethnic culture, but which nevertheless referred to cultural phenomena regarded in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) as 'ethnic'. The clearest example can be found in the commercial newspaper *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s satirical illustrations of Sakha (Yakutia)'s constitution, which, as the example printed in Figure 4.1 on the opposite side of this page shows, used a small group of individuals, each with a set of specifically ethnic characteristics, to represent Sakha (Yakutia)'s general population (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, September 3, 2004: p. 14). The hooded reindeer-skin suit and skis are associated with traditional Eveny and Evenky reindeer-herding cultures, while the dagger and bushy moustache are regarded as traditional to Caucasian ethnic cultures; the other figures' attributes also connect them to a specific ethnic group. As this chapter will show, the quantitative and qualitative analyses brought out and explained the difference in emphasis between government and commercial newspapers, revealing the relationship between the government and commercial discourses.

Table 4.1 shows the percentage of headlines given the codes 'Ethnicity', 'Super Ethnicity', or 'Buryat Cultural Practice', in all four newspapers. It also shows the number of articles these percentages refer to, and hence the number of times a regular reader would have encountered a reference to these themes over the sample periods. For example, a *Buryatia* reader would have come across an article touching on ethnicity 36 times over the month of June.

Newspaper:	Ethnicity	Super Ethnicity	Buryat Cultural Practice	Russian Cultural Practice
Buryatia (June only, *N* = 371)	9.7 (36)	*n/a*	8.4 (31)	3.5 (13)
Barguzinskaya Pravda (*N* = 218)	0.5 (1)	*n/a*	6.0 (13)	3.7 (8)
Inform Polis (*N* = 298)	*n/a*	5.4 (16)	6.0 (18)	3.7 (11)
Pyatnitsa Plyus (N = 75)	*n/a*	3.0 (2)	0 (0)	5.3 (4)

Table 4.1: Percentages of articles marked with codes related to ethnic culture (the figures in brackets are the number of articles to which the codes were attached; *N* = the number of articles in the sample; *n/a* = not applicable)

As Table 4.1 shows, the republican government newspaper *Buryatia* contains the largest number of references to 'Buryat Cultural Practice' and 'Ethnicity' (31 and 36, or 8.4 and 9.7 per cent of the sampled material). *Buryatia*'s references to ethnicity concerned a specific notion that took its clearest form in *Buryatia*'s high quality articles on history, culture, religion and distinguished members of the intelligentsia. 17 of these were published over the month of June, as the pleasurable 'cultural creativity' (*kul'turnoye tvorchestvo*) pieces described in Chapter Three. They display a self-conscious concern with what they demarcate as 'ethnic' themes, by referring either to a recognisable ethnic group (principally Russian, Buryat or Evenk), or to 'ethnicity' as an abstract concept.

Presenting 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic culture' as abstract concepts makes it easier for *Buryatia* to demonstrate an even-handed approach to Buryatia's

various peoples, since it allows *Buryatia* to represent different cultures as manifestations of a generalised abstract phenomenon. *Buryatia*'s use of this concept enabled it to balance articles on 'Russian' ethnic culture with 'Buryat' pieces, which mirrored the style and content of the 'Russian' articles. For example, a series of celebratory features about a visit to Poland was published with an equivalent series on the Republic of Kalmykia, another Siberian non-Russian Republic. Like the Buryat the Kalmyk have a Buddhist tradition, and are regarded as being of Mongolian descent; they and the Buryat are seen to be part of the 'Mongol' family of peoples, in the same way that Russians and Poles are Slavic. Thus, the Russian and Buryat populations of Buryatia are given an equal opportunity to celebrate their 'brother' peoples, taken as equivalent 'ethnic groups'. The high proportion of articles marked 'ethnicity' in *Buryatia* could therefore reflect an attempt to foster a pan-ethnic loyalty to the republican state.

Buryatia made more references to 'Buryat Cultural Practice' than 'Russian Cultural Practice' (31, as opposed to 13, or 8.4 and 3.5 per cent of the sample). This variation is likely to have been affected by the particular events taking place in June: Buryatia's Buddhist church organised several occasions, and the traditional Buryat *Surkharban* sports tournament took place on June 12 (*Buryatia*, June 17, 2004: p. 1). In addition, the discourse analysis showed that *Buryatia*'s large number of references to 'Ethnicity' and 'Buryat Cultural Practice' arises in part from the importance Buryat nationalist discourse has in the republican government's political communication strategies, as the following section describes. However, the importance of celebrating Russian as well as Buryat culture is shown by the August and September sample, which contains a larger number of references to Russian cultural practice: *Buryatia*

devoted much space to the head of the Old Believer Church's visit to the Republic, among other subjects connected to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The sub-regional government newspaper *Barguzinskaya Pravda* also showed awareness of a need to give equal attention to each ethnic group. For example, a winning Buryat 'My Family' essay was published next to a reader's letter about her Russian grandmother (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 17, 2004; p. 5). However in contrast to *Buryatia*, *Barguzinskaya Pravda* contained only one reference to ethnicity – although Buryat or Russian cultural practice occurred in the same proportion of articles as *Inform Polis* (6.0 and 3.7 percent respectively). 'Ethnicity' was attached to the coverage of a republican government-sponsored conference on the restoration of cultural monuments, whose delegates visited Barguzin region to see Lake Baikal; it belongs to the category of the republican-level public ceremonial occasions discussed in Chapter Three (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 10, 2004: p. 4). The articles mentioning Russian and Buryat 'cultural practice' were either descriptions of holidays that involved Buryat or Russian folk culture as part of the celebration, or were themselves unselfconscious manifestations of a Russian or Buryat cultural mindset. The discourse analysis revealed that the articles marked 'Buryat Cultural Practice' in *Barguzinskaya Pravda* indicate the presence of a distinct Buryat mindset in Barguzin region – despite the homogenisation occurring over the twentieth century – as Section 3.1 of this chapter will describe. The meaning of ethnicity in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s discursive space refers to observable differences in belief between the sub-region's ethnic groups, rather than to issues involving politics or personal identification.

Ethnicity has a different relevance for each of the commercial newspapers, all of which contrast with *Barguzinskaya Pravda*. *Pyatnitsa Plyus* is striking in that it contains no references to Buryat cultural practices, although 5.3 percent of its articles mention Russian cultural practice, as Table 4.1 shows. This is unsurprising, since it was described as a 'Russian newspaper', produced by Russians for a largely Russian audience, by a Buryat friend who had been offered the job of 'Buryat expert' at another popular 'Russian' newspaper, *Nomer Odin*. (*Nomer Odin*'s Russian journalists had wanted to ensure that they did not completely ignore a Buryat audience.) Similarly, the proportions of *Inform Polis* articles marked as 'Buryat' or 'Russian' cultural practice (6.0 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively, in Table 4.1) indicate that *Inform Polis* is a 'Buryat' newspaper which is also unwilling to exclude a Russian audience.

The Russian emphasis in *Pyatnitsa Plyus* can be seen in its exclusive coverage of Orthodox or Old Believer events. It reported a visit of the leader of the Old Believer Church to Ulan Ude, but not the anniversary of Catherine the Great's acceptance of the Buddhist church in Russia, unlike *Buryatia* and *Inform Polis*. Meanwhile, some of the *Inform Polis* pieces on Buddhism are communications made on behalf of Buryatia's Buddhist organisations, rather than reports of their activities, as are its articles on the Orthodox Church. For example, *Inform Polis* published the Khambo Lama's official invitation for the participants of a Buddhist festival involving traditional Buryat sports, followed two weeks later by a Buddhist text in Buryat in honour of the occasion, and finally by a feature covering the festival itself (*Inform Polis*, August 25, 2004: p. 3; September 8, 2004: p. 13; September 22, 2004: p. 11). This suggests that *Inform Polis* has a specific arrangement to publicise the Buddhist church. The

way these newspapers' handling of religion falls along ethnic lines is striking confirmation of their sensitivity to issues of ethnic balance. The Buryat orientation of *Inform Polis* can also be seen in the unusually high proportion of Buryats who appear in its narratives. The extent to which *Inform Polis* presents Buryats as the ordinary population, rather than as a distinct ethnic group, is illustrated by the Buryat appearance of the generalised person in a feature showing the various illnesses and dangers that can occur during Buryatia's summer, shown in Figure 4.2 on the opposite page (*Inform Polis*, June 25, 2004: p. 14).

Inform Polis is sold as a high-quality commercial newspaper, which would want to avoid alienating potential readers, and at the same time compromising its reputation and relationship with the political elites by becoming involved in arguments. Like *Buryatia*, *Inform Polis* balances pieces on Buryat tradition with 'Russian' articles, although the sample contained almost twice as many articles marked 'Buryat Cultural Practice' as 'Russian Cultural Practice', as Table 4.1 shows. Eight out of the 18 'Buryat Cultural Practice' articles in *Inform Polis* were news stories involving Buryat culture, history or tradition. For example, one article describes the discovery that the American actress Uma Thurman is descended from the Buryat lama Agvan Dorzhiyev (*Inform Polis*, June 30, 2004: p. 5). Two 'Buryat Cultural Practice' features were on themes that did not directly concern Buryat cultural practice, such as the obituary of a Buryat teacher who was killed in the Beslan siege. Seven out of the 11 'Russian cultural practice' pieces were similar news stories, while the rest of both Buryat and Russian 'Cultural Practice' articles were page-long features involving aspects of Russian or Buryat culture, such as the Orthodox or

Buddhist religions. These figures show that both Russian and Buryat cultural phenomena have a consistent place within *Inform Polis*' news agenda. (**In fact, an *Inform Polis* journalist I interviewed in 2009 confirmed that the editorial team try to include at least one article on ethnic culture per issue.)** However, the greater number of 'Buryat' feature articles (eight, as opposed to four out of a sample of 10 newspapers) indicates that *Inform Polis*' journalists have, or perceive their audience to have, a deeper interest in Buryat culture.

The existence of 'Russian' and 'Buryat' newspapers reveals a perception among journalists that two ethnic audiences exist in Buryatia. The commercial newspapers behave on the assumption that these two audiences are distinct enough to require adaptation in the newspapers they buy, although they may have overlapping interests and characteristics in most areas. The government newspapers *Buryatia* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda* also tailor their content to accommodate Buryat and Russian affiliations, displaying a similar concern for ethnic identity on the part of the republican government.

Section 4.2: Buryat nationalist ideology and government legitimisation

However, *Buryatia*'s June sample contained no fewer than 12 articles that expressed ideas closely related to Buryat nationalist ideology. For example, *Buryatia* published an article on the American Mongolianist Robert Rupen's visit, despite the unwillingness of many other republican mass media organs to cover it. Members of the Association of Young Academics told me that they had experienced an "information blockade", when they had tried to publicise Rupen's arrival, although they did manage to organise a live interview on a

republican television channel. Rupen took this opportunity to criticise the federal government over its move to merge the Buryat Ust-Ordynsk Autonomous Okrug with Irkutsk Oblast. He thus potentially put President Potapov's government in an awkward position with regard to the federal government, for having allowed public criticism of a controversial federal policy. The Buryat author of *Buryatia*'s article not only quoted the negative comments Rupen made about the federal government, but also extended and praised them, expressing some of the most direct criticism of the federal and republican governments encountered in *Buryatia* during this study:

> The fact that certain Russian state [*Rossiyskiye*] politicians are absolutely indifferent to the general state of the Buryat people in contemporary Russia is demonstrated by the attempt to abolish the Ust-Ordynsk Buryat autonomous territory.
>
> The resolving of national problems lies in the area of the development of national cultures; they understood that in the 1990s, when they started to create laws in the national republics directed towards the defence of national cultures. For the Buryat people it was also important to build up a general programme for the development of national culture in the Republic and territories. However, the absence of a policy on nationalities, and a fear of the politicization of inter-ethnic [*mezhnatsional'nykh*] relationships in Russia lead to the substitution of laws on national cultures for featureless laws on the norms of cultural preservation, and the regulation of cultural institutions' activities. (*Buryatia*, June 12, 2004: p. 4)

Inform Polis, the only other newspaper in the sample to cover Rupen's visit, instead concentrated not on what Rupen said but on his encounter with the Buryat academics Garmazhap Sanzhiyev and Bimba Tsibikov. It went no further than a brief mention of Rupen's television interview, where "he answered many

questions, most of which related to the forthcoming enlargement of the regions and the liquidation of autonomy" (*Inform Polis*, June 2, 2004: p. 6.).

Buryatia's Buryat nationalist ideology appeared more often within celebrations of Buryat culture or personalities than as direct demands. The Buryat nationalist arguments of the late 1980s were conditioned by ideas promoted during the Soviet period. Chapter One explained how a hierarchical conception of the Soviet Union's ethnic makeup was promoted after the Second World War, according to which some ethnic cultures (principally Russian or European) were regarded as more 'civilised' than others. Post-Soviet Buryat nationalist claims revolve around the contention that the Buryat have a highly developed cultural and spiritual tradition which the Soviets tried to stifle. The Buryat nationalist revival began with public celebrations of Buryat culture, which challenged the official Soviet preference for Russian culture (Stroganova, 2001; Khamutayev, 2005). The Buryat people's Buddhist heritage is regarded by nationalists to be an especially valuable aspect of their culture, since it allows Buryats to claim participation in a widely recognised international cultural tradition, as does the Buryat's status as a 'Mongol' people. Buddhist and Mongolian history and culture are thus prominent themes in *Buryatia*'s nationalist articles.

Since the activities of Buryat nationalists have been confined by the present republican administration to the cultural rather than the political domain, a carefully nuanced public celebration of Buryat religion and culture can still be understood as a nationalist statement.[22] The following paragraphs illustrate the

[22] As Elena Stroganova and Vladimir Khamutayev describe, President Potapov and his supporters stood against the Buryat nationalist candidate Vladimir Saganov in the Republic of Buryatia's first presidential election (Stroganova, 2001; Khamutayev, 2005). President Potapov's administration has discouraged the political objectives of Buryat nationalists, in order

muted nationalist arguments that result; they are from an article celebrating the Buryat composer Yuriy Irdyneyev:

> In 1991 the ballet "Face of the Goddess" became the laureate for the State Prize of the Republic of Buryatia in the literature and art section. By means of this work, the composer wanted to say that the Mongols, like any other people, have a right to their own fate, on their particular psychological, physical and everyday way of being.
>
> A true nationalism, a pride in one's people, in tandem with the feeling of pain and shame at the fall of collective initiative [*passionarnost',* a term coined by Lev Nikolayevich Gumilev to mean 'the capacity and the urge to break the aggregate setting of the surroundings'] was equated by the great thinkers of the past with a spiritual fire, burning to ashes within. One can say that in the contemporary omnipresent vulgarity Yuriy Irdyneyevich is trying to warm himself with the heat from that fire. With his works he tries to reach the heart of the unsophisticated Buryat, and, searching out the place of his people among the ranks of others, turns to his people's past, its deep and distinctive logic, to genuine heroes. For it gives a real account, in the sense that, under the conditions of increasing globalisation, only the nations that retain their individual uniqueness in the face of history can survive. (*Buryatia*, June 10, 2004: p. 5)

The consistency with which Buryat authors from the same academic background, some of whom participated in the post-Soviet Buryat revival, make recognisably nationalist statements indicates that the Buryat nationalist movement still has significance within *Buryatia*'s discursive space. Buryatia's other republican-level government-sponsored newspaper, *Buryaad Unen*, is published in Buryat, and has an extremely small readership – in part because few Buryats can read literary Buryat easily, although they may be fluent in their

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to maintain a good relationship with the federal government: Buryatia's economy depends on federal subsidies (Stroganova, 2001; Khamutayev, 2005).

regional dialect. Translations of *Buryaad Unen*'s headlines, together with its Russian articles, indicate that many of its articles are either translations of *Buryatia*'s nationalist pieces on Buryat culture and history, or are based on the same paradigms. In addition, major political figures are reported to have attended or sponsored occasions that promote Buryat culture. For example, President Potapov himself has helped the Agvan Dorzhiyev memorial fund, which is devoted to preserving the memory of a leading Buryat Buddhist lama killed by the Soviets during the 1930s (*Buryatia*, August 25, 2004: p. 4: Tubchinov, 2003: p. 29). These differing forms of official public patronage indicate that Buryat nationalist intellectuals are being allowed to continue their activities as part of the political establishment, despite the risk of this tolerance causing strains in the Potapov administration's relationship with the federal government.

There are likely to be several reasons for this apparent contradiction. Firstly, both politicians and businessmen regard the Republic's Buryat heritage to be a potential draw for tourists**, as several friends mentioned. The spread of this conviction is also demonstrated by the stalls selling Mongolian souvenirs that line Ulan Ude's main street, and the elaborate shows of traditional Buryat song and dance put on by the Opera Theatre.** Then there are historical reasons. Buryat ethnic nationalism arose out of the same cultural context as the present political elite. Many of the actors involved in both would have known each other personally. Nationalist-democratic concepts must still have a relevance to Buryatia's self-legitimisation as an independently existing state, since it was created as the result of a nationalist-democratic initiative. It is therefore important that the government is seen to support both the continued

Buryat cultural revival, and ethnic cultural expression in general, in contrast to the repressive Soviet government. Finally, the republican government may take the view that allowing the Buryat nationalists to continue their activities channels nationalist discourse, decreasing the likelihood of new and unfamiliar nationalist movements developing. However, none of these factors is sufficient to explain the startling extent to which the republican government allows *Buryatia* to express Buryat nationalist views that are in effect a form of dissent.

Buryatia's Buryat nationalist articles have sufficiently distinct characteristics to stand out as a separate strand of discourse within the newspaper. However, they also repeat or adapt ideas that occur consistently throughout the rest of the newspaper, particularly in the articles connected to ethnicity. Both the non-nationalist and nationalist articles in *Buryatia* on traditional culture are based on the conception of ethnicity adapted from the Soviet Union, described at the beginning of this chapter. The subjects of *Buryatia*'s formulation of ethnicity are the 'ethnic groups', principally Russian and Buryat, and their cultural and historical traits. *Buryatia*'s articles celebrate the culture, history and intellectuals of the Buryat and Russian 'people' (*narod*) in the abstract, as is illustrated when these pieces are compared with the commercial newspapers' treatment of ethnic culture.

In the commercial newspapers, the narratives on 'ethnicity', 'Buryat culture' or 'Russian culture' concern primarily the experience of the *narod*'s individual members. The articles in *Inform Polis* are characterised by simple language and are clearly not intended to be literary creations in themselves. The themes and subjects are more sharply drawn than in *Buryatia*'s features, and there are more direct quotations from the individuals these articles concern

alongside a greater variety of character and event. This difference in focus is illustrated in the comparison of two articles on the Buryat Khambo lama Agvan Dorzhiyev, appearing in *Buryatia* and *Inform Polis*.[23] The headlines and introductory paragraphs are presented in Textbox 4.1.

Buryatia	***Inform Polis***
Headline: Agvan Dorzhiyev – the founder and maintainer of a great tradition	**Headline; sub-headline:** The secret letters of the eighth Dalai-lama; His personal correspondence with Agvan Dorzhiyev has been found. The ruler of Tibet prepared to ask for asylum in Soviet Russia
Our newspaper has already informed on the ceremonies for the 150th anniversary of Agvan Dorzhiyev's birthday, in the villages of Khara-Shibir' and Atsagat in Zaigrayevskiy region. Now, when the jubilee commotion has quieted, one wants to cast a glance at the personality of this man from the position of the present day: what shoots sprout from the tradition he has left; the lessons he has bequeathed. (*Buryatia*, August 25, 2004: p. 4.)	A unique discovery was made in Buryatia's History Museum during the planned processing of archived documents – the personal correspondence of the eighth Dalai-Lama with his representative in Soviet Russia, Agvan Dorzhiyev (*Inform Polis* September 1, 2004: p. 11.)

[23] The word 'Khambo' refers to a high position in the Buddhist hierarchy of lamas, or Buddhist monks.

Textbox 4.1. The headlines and introductory paragraphs of two articles published in *Buryatia* and *Inform Polis* on Agvan Dorzhiyev

The *Inform Polis* article describes and celebrates how a museum worker found the letters, Dorzhiyev's experiences at the Dalai-Lama's palace in Tibet, his great contribution to world history, and his close relationship with the Dalai-Lama. It offers the reader personal information about a great historical figure, an exciting human interest story about an unexpected discovery, and it provides an opportunity for *Inform Polis*' Buryat readership to take pride in the talents and personality of a fellow Buryat. The *Buryatia* article treats the subject in a more general way, going on to celebrate Dorzhiyev and his colleagues' achievements, describe the occasion, and to argue for more resources to be devoted to celebrating his memory.

In *Buryatia* ethnicity is usually mentioned in connection with past tradition: 28 out of the 36 articles marked 'ethnicity' also carried the code 'history or tradition'. *Buryatia*'s article celebrates Dorzhiyev and his fellow intellectuals as the upholders of the great Buryat Buddhist tradition rather than as the personalities described by *Inform Polis*. In *Buryatia* these figures, and by implication also the nationalists devoted to maintaining their memory, have succeeded in conserving this Buryat tradition, despite the Soviet repression. *Buryatia* ends by celebrating his legacy:

> *Agvan Dorzhiyev was at one and the same time the founder and maintainer of a great tradition. We are obliged to his exploits, along with the efforts of other outstanding actors, for the continued existence, true, not without significant losses, of this inheritance to the present day. We, the inhabitants of contemporary Buryatia, independent of our ethnic groups,*

> *but the Buryat in particular, must remember which traditions we inherit, and the owners of which incalculable riches, spiritual above all, we are, and must be proud of this. This, from our point of view, is the most important lesson of the Tsanid-Khambo* [Dorzhiyev] *to us, who now live.* [*Buryatia*'s italics.] (*Buryatia*, August 25, 2004: p. 4.)

However, the different ethnic cultures, traditions and religions themselves are not discussed in great detail. The differences between them are thus reduced to differences in traditional practice, rather than in values or mindset. The following quotation from the Buryat nationalist article on Agvan Dorzhiyev illustrates this tendency:

> Using the lively activities of A. Dorzhiyev as an example, Zhalsan Batuyevich [Sanzhiyev, the director of the Buryat National Lycée no. 1] appealed for the culture of our birth to be preserved and valued, for Buryat language to be developed, and most importantly, to love and speak it. As if answering this call, the elderly inhabitant of Zaigrayev **Tsyrendulma Namsarayeva** sang a song about the treasures of human birth, the temporality and emptiness of the Universe, put together, as the story has it, by Agvan Dorzhiyev. She read Dambayev's verses on the imperishable body of Khambo Etigelo [a Buryat Khambo Lama] in Buryat, and "The Preserver Lkhamo" by Dugarov in Russian, in which occurs these lines: ***"And battle won't save the world, but the battle of calming prayers."*** Talents like those of Tsyrendulma Sanditovna's … would turn a tourist's presence into an unforgettable occasion… (*Buryatia*, August 25, 2004: p. 4.)

The Buddhist religious values expressed in Tsyrendulma Namsarayeva's performance are not being celebrated for their own sake: the author would not be expressing such concern about the need to preserve Buryat culture and language if they were committed to transcending the empty temporal Universe. Instead, Namsarayeva and Dorzhiyev's spiritual and artistic talents are being

used to argue for the preservation of Buryat culture, itself represented as a treasury of spiritual and cultural knowledge developed by past generations.

The association made by *Buryatia*'s Dorzhiyev article between abstracted spiritual values and Buryat cultural tradition exemplifies one of *Buryatia*'s typical narrative elements, based around a notion of a transcending, universal spiritual dimension, the knowledge of which lies in past 'ethnic' tradition. The articles marked 'ethnicity', along with the other 'cultural creativity' pieces, imply that history, culture, religion and tradition have an intrinsic value. The artists, musicians, academics, religious actors, writers, ethnic groups and journalists who appear in these articles are implied to have a particular access to this transcendent spiritual dimension, linked to their artistic or intellectual talent, and their personal commitment to morality, spirituality and 'ethnic' cultural tradition. The introductory paragraph from the article about Yuriy Irdyneyev illustrates this connection between culture, religion, ethnicity and universal value:

> Composer and spiritual figure – how closely do these understandings stand together? Each using their own means, the one and the other call to the inner world of the person, working on the delicate resonators of the soul. …
>
> The composer, honoured worker of the arts of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Buryatia, winner of the Republic of Buryatia's state prize Yuriy (Tsybikzhap) Irdyneyev has perfect social pitch perception, and instinctively reacts to the breathing of the times. To him fell the lucky possibility of feeding off the unclouded streams of folk memory, which are still preserved in the precious corners of the Buryat hinterland. These truly priceless treasuries of human knowledge, which contain the experience and wisdom of centuries, became the guiding star of his life, being the source of serious thought about the past and

present of his people, and the themes and ideas for his creativity. (*Buryatia*, June 10, 2004: p. 5.)

Both individuals, such as Yuriy Irdyneyev, and ethnic groups are celebrated for having maintained their connection with their ethnic cultures. Mongols for example are praised through a description of their traditional summer festival, *Bayar Naadam*, the only event in the world to "compress past, present and future into one whole" (*Buryatia*, June 25, 2004: p. 21).

The exact nature of *Buryatia*'s universal spiritual value is not clear. It remains implicit, as an evocation of both the universally moral, powerful and good that has somehow been lost or hidden, and the striving of humanity towards it. It can appear as an uncorrupted life force from the primordial past, or from the wild landscape – as the following quotation, from a series describing a visit to Mongolia, shows:

> The Mongolian steppes and hills are that special, still untouched by grasping human action. From them blows an undisclosed mystery. They breathe an inexplicable energy. This energy, this power lifts huge golden eagles into the heavenly heights, the size of whose wings can exceed two metres.
>
> And that feeling somehow brought my high understanding of power, of God, to Earth, closer to the person. Yes, powers change, even gods come and go, but the yearning of the soul towards the beautiful, the mysterious, the good remains throughout the ages, making one pass manfully through misfortune and sorrow... (*Buryatia*, June 25, 2004: p. 21)

The previous two quotations also illustrate the idealised personality that appears in tandem with the references to universal value. This personality's defining

characteristics seem to contradict the negative qualities of everyday politics: the articles' subjects and writers are presented as emotional, moral and sensitive, while their commitment to their quest for universal good overrides any personal interests. These articles in fact help to delineate the idealised status quo, which *Buryatia* represents as reality.

The universal good of the 'cultural creativity' pieces is translated into the articles about politics as a contention that culture, religion and tradition are together an important resource for society. *Buryatia* shows the republic's politicians to have a deep commitment towards developing this cultural sphere, firstly in order to stimulate its positive social effects, and secondly because of their own moral beliefs. Politicians demonstrate this commitment through their public participation in cultural, religious or traditional occasions, in addition to direct statements of belief made during interviews, as in the following example. This quotation is from an interview with the Vice-Chairman of the *Khural*'s Committee for Social Policy, Konstantin Sobolev:

> And, finally, thirdly, the more people of culture there are in power, the faster Russia will rise. Without spirituality, national consciousness, traditions, ideas (and art and culture in particular accumulate these, keeping them for the next generations), the people is just a crowd, and therefore in the future both government and society are doomed to enter an epoch of muddle and disintegration, since without a spiritual foundation the house of governance is doomed to fall.
>
> I am convinced that, now, when the social-economic situation of the country is better, when the signs of stability are evident, when the "top" clearly perceive the goals standing before the country, it's time to invest in the national soul! For Russian citizens (it's traditional), ideas of fairness, goodness, togetherness were always more important than mercantile interests. (*Buryatia*, June 10, 2004: p. 3)

As Chapter Three described, *Buryatia*'s political communication revolves around the demonstration that the ideals it presents correspond to Buryatia's reality. This demonstration extends beyond the newspaper's discursive space in the form of public ceremonial occasions, accompanied by personal initiatives on the part of individual politicians. Accordingly, Sobolev personifies the "people of culture" (*lyudi kul'tury*) he contends should have authority: he is also a published poet. President Leonid Potapov meanwhile was given an honorary doctorate by Buryatia's State University in 2004, establishing his credentials as an academic, and therefore also *kul'turniy*, politician.

The repeated location of universal values and spiritual power in ethnic culture affords the Buryat nationalist intellectuals a specific role within the government self-legitimisation rituals carried out by *Buryatia*, and the ceremonial occasions it covers. It gives republican politicians a strong imperative to work with prominent promoters of ethnic culture, in order to demonstrate their commitment to universal ideals via their involvement with and support for ethnic cultural tradition. An example of collaboration between the republican executive and Buryat intellectuals is the June 2004 conference organised by the republican executive (*pravitel'stvo*) and Ulan-Ude's Institute for Mongolian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, celebrating the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Russian Federation's Humanitarian Fund (*Buryatia*, June 24, 2004: p. 1). Many of those involved in the Buryat nationalist revival were and continue to be employed by this Institute – such as Garmazhap Sanzhiyev, who helped prepare Buryatia's declaration of autonomy in 1994. *Buryatia* in fact published a eulogising article about Sanzhiyev to celebrate his eightieth birthday,

indicating his continuing presence in the Republic's political establishment (*Buryatia*, September 16, 2004: p. 4). However, other political decisions that are not officially publicised demonstrate that the politicians' devotion to the cultural sphere has its limits. For example, the republican government refused to fund the highly acclaimed dance company CheloVEK, forcing it to move to Omsk.

Section 4.3: Contemporary Buryat culture

Section 4.3.1: Traditional Buryat spirituality in Buryatia's sub-regions

Barguzinskaya Pravda contained evidence that pre-Soviet Buryat beliefs still exist in Buryatia's rural sub-regions, **corroborating Altanhuu Hürelbaatar's contention that Buryats practiced religion in secret throughout the Soviet period (Hürelbaatar, 2007: p. 138).** A rich source of this evidence was a competition for children and teenagers, run as part of the celebrations of International Family Day. *Barguzinskaya Pravda* published the winning pieces and poems, which had to have the title 'My Family' (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 14, 2004: pp. 4–5; June 17, 2004: p. 6). Among the nine pieces are three that, judging by the surnames, have Buryat authors (Tugutova, Radnayeva and Emedeyeva). Their authors celebrate their individual families, but also make general statements on the value of respecting one's family, clan and ancestors. They do this by referring to pre-Soviet Buryat practices, such as ancestor worship, as the following quotes show:

Every person should know their genealogy [*rodoslovnaya*]. Because your genealogy is your roots, which can be compared to the roots of a tree. The deeper a tree's roots are, the more beautiful and fruitful it will be. In the same way, a person's genealogy should be rich. It isn't an accident that there's a proverb about Ivan who didn't know his parentage, and there are quite a few proverbs and sayings among us Buryat, teaching us to know our clan, and respect our family.

For a very long time the Buryat have known their genealogies to the seventh generation, from their early years. The old people came up to the children, unexpectedly for all asked questions about their ancestors, and saw how their kids reacted. If they answered confidently, without stumbling, then they were praised and given treats.

We talked about all this at our festival 'My Family', which united the many clans of Khilgan. My clan is called Sengeldur. There are quite a few famous and talented people in our clan. For example, Soodoy-lama is famous not only in Barguzin valley, but also beyond its borders. We have a habit of worshiping the place (Suburgan) where our forefather is buried. I think that we should have these festivals, because we learn there about our forefathers.

I would like to finish this essay with the proverb, 'The roots of a man are over the ground, and those of a tree are under the ground'. (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 14, 2004: p. 5.)

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In a difficult moment the whole family will come round to help; everyone does what they can and doesn't expect a reward. If something bad happens to one of our relatives, all the other members of the family gather round and use their combined efforts to help him. No one suggests that he didn't get ill by accident, that he's ruining the plans of others, that he's already got enough problems, that he's weak and useless, if he can't get out of that situation himself. We don't have that in my family, and I'm very proud of it. (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 14, 2004: p. 5.)

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> The family is our trusted bulwark in any deprivations and sorrow … In our hard and restless time every person needs to display love and goodness to all people. And all that depends on his family, on how families bring up their children, which moral orientation his parents gave him. If we gradually improve how children are brought up in their families, our contemporary society will become morally healthy. We, the contemporary generation, must remember the practices and traditions of our clan, not forgetting that families are sacred. (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 17, 2004: p. 6.)

A fourth piece emphasizes the importance of families in the bringing up of children, and of knowing and respecting one's *rodoslovnaya*. The other winning contributions celebrate individual members of the authors' immediate families, and the love and friendship within which they live. The Buryat authors were in the eighth or ninth school year, making them 14 or 15 years of age. They would have been writing what they expected would please the competition judges. This, in combination with the similarity of the values these pieces express, indicates these teenagers were reproducing what their elder relatives had been telling them. These pieces therefore show that pre-Soviet Buryat conceptions of clan, tradition and family co-exist with the more widespread ideas these pieces also contain – for example, about the importance of a loving family in bringing up children. They reflect the many comments I heard during my fieldwork on the strength and importance of the Buryat extended family.[24]

[24] Caroline Humphrey discusses rural Buryat family networks and genealogy in *Marx Went Away – But Karl Stayed Behind* (Humphrey, 1998). **Galina Manzanova also emphasises the importance kin and territorial networks have within Buryatia's urbanisation patterns (Manzanova, 2007).**

The first of the above quotations hints that the appropriate ancestor worship will bring prosperity: a 'tree' with 'deep roots' will be fruitful, unlike those who do not know their parentage or genealogy. In doing so, the article recalls the traditional Buryat practice of worshiping ancestor spirits in order to ensure their beneficial influence over daily life. The quotation below expands on this hint, indicating that pre-Soviet Buryat animist beliefs continue to exist, at least among adult Buryats in rural regions. These beliefs were incorporated into the Buddhism that became widespread among eastern Buryats from the seventeenth century. They were traditionally based on the idea that both the individual subject and the external world are made up of spirits, with varying capacities for good and bad activity. These spirits can inhabit or own particular sites, such as trees, rocks or mountains, which are regarded as sacred. This article's author is a youth policy expert (*spetsialist po delam molodyozhi*), who is reporting on a seminar she attended on Zakamensk region's youth facilities. Her central point is that Barguzin needs to follow Zakamensk's example. She describes the various successful initiatives the Zakamensk administration has organized, such as introducing paid youth leaders in every village, but her article finishes with the following statements:

> During the excursion around the sacred places the guide described how the tradition of 'sprinkling', i.e. drinking vodka at sacred places, is successfully dying down – since the lamas explained to everyone: 'Imagine people came to your house, got drunk, left rubbish behind and went. Would you like it?!'
>
> The road to the village of Ulekchin goes through the Under-Baobai pass. According to the legend, Under-Baobai was a pretty good warrior, who once spent the night in the pass with his soldiers and pregnant wife. Suddenly many enemies attacked, and the warrior, his soldiers and wife all died. But the spirit of Under-Baobai walks in the pass. From this comes

> the local belief [*pover'ye*] that you can't cross the pass, without asking the spirit's permission. And it's not recommended for pregnant women to travel through here at all, but if it's absolutely necessary, then the women wear belts to look like men.
>
> The inhabitants of Zakamensk often say that things go well for them because they ask permission from the local spirits before every journey, and in general they try to preserve everything good, especially tradition.
>
> There's something to learn from them, isn't there? (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 14, 2004: p. 3.)

Another article celebrating a Buryat veteran from the Second World War has the headline, 'He prayed to the gods of Barguzin valley for salvation' (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 11, 2004: p. 3). The piece focuses on the veteran's courage and suffering as a prisoner of war. One small paragraph out of the page-long article describes how his prayers were answered, when the Germans were about to execute him: at the last minute they decided not to shoot, and he survived to return home.

A significant point is that none of these articles display a concern with Buryat culture or tradition in the abstract, unlike the nationalist articles in *Buryatia*. Their authors instead use Buryat frames of reference to make their points, whether they are celebrating their families, describing Zakamensk's youth organisations, or writing a war veteran's biography. A possible explanation is that the Buryats living in Barguzin sub-region have not developed the conscious interest in Buryat culture that might arise if their ethnic identity generated difficult questions. The authors of these pieces make no effort to frame or justify their espousal of what they know are ethnic-specific beliefs, as they might if they were concerned about potentially hostile audience members (whether Russian or Buryat), or if they themselves were not entirely comfortable

with the beliefs they were expressing. The teenage authors were too young to have developed a mature sense of **self** or of the nuances in the relationship between Barguzin's Buryats and Russians. They were however old enough to be aware of any major issues caused by ethnic cultural difference in the region. If there is an ethnic nationalism movement in Barguzin, then it is not significant enough to require Barguzin's regional government publicly to engage with it in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, as the republican government does by allowing Buryat nationalist intellectuals to publish in *Buryatia*. All this indicates that these specifically Buryat beliefs are not in general a cause of controversy, either within Buryat groups or in the region as a whole.

4.3.2: Buryat cultural development

The difficulty of newspaper distribution in Buryatia means that the majority of commercial newspaper audiences live in Ulan Ude. Another reason for this is that rural populations, and especially agricultural workers, are less likely to be able to afford commercial newspapers after the collapse of Buryatia's agricultural industries. Buryatia's large territory, small population and poor roads isolate rural communities, so that daily life in the country is very different from that in Ulan Ude. Ulan Ude's greater connection with the rest of the Russian Federation exposes its Buryat inhabitants to strong Russifying influences, while their urban setting hinders them from continuing the traditional Buryat practices predicated on a close relationship with a specific territory and its spirits. Several Buryat inhabitants of Ulan Ude remarked to me during my fieldwork that the only difference between them and the Russians is their Asian appearance. A sign of this Russification is the extent to which the Buryat

language is falling out of use among urban Buryats: in a study by Irina Yelayeva, published in 2004, 37 per cent of the rural sample said they mainly spoke Buryat at home, compared to 12 per cent of the urban respondents (Yelayeva, 2004: p. 582). It is possible to wonder whether *Buryatia*'s depiction of ethnic culture as referring to different past traditions represents the real significance of ethnicity to the Republic's urban Buryat populations. The impossibility of identifying with what is, **in the wake of the Soviet nationalities policy,** generally regarded to be an important part of one's personhood must therefore be a common problem for contemporary Buryats. The section that follows explores this possibility. It presents evidence from Buryatia's commercial newspapers, indicating that a Buryat culture and identity do continue to exist in the towns.

Inform Polis' features and longer news articles crystallize the ideas it projects about Buryat ethnic culture itself, which remain implicit in the shorter pieces. These pieces indicate the emotional significance a Buryat identity is **perceived** to have for *Inform Polis*' readers. These articles are all coded 'human interest', with the exception of the Buryat Buddhist text mentioned in the previous section. Human interest articles offer their readers an enjoyable emotional engagement with the article's theme. As the following paragraphs suggest, the particular emotional engagement the journalists evoke in these pieces implies an assumption that their audience has a specific interest in Buryat religion and ethnic tradition.

Unlike *Buryatia*'s 'creative writing' pieces, *Inform Polis*' articles on ethnic religion or culture describe their subjects' experience sympathetically, either by quoting them directly, or by adapting the journalists' writing style into what might be their 'voice'. The subjects themselves are usually Buryats

participating in a Buryat religious or cultural ritual, such as a traditional Buryat Buddhist sports competition (*Inform Polis*, September 22, 2004: p. 11). They appear wholeheartedly and unselfconsciously to accept what they are doing and experiencing, even though the journalists must know that a Russian or a Russianised Buryat could have difficulty in adopting the beliefs that underpin the actions and responses described. For example, the Buryat sumo-wrestler Anatoliy (Tolya) Mikhakhanov describes his interaction with the Khambo Lama Itigelov's incorruptible body:[25]

> 'At first it was cold, then it got warmer, my hands became hot and my temples felt as if they were being squeezed', said Tolya later about his first sensations in the temple. 'But there wasn't any pain, instead such a pleasant feeling…'
>
> They prevented other visitors from approaching the body with a small red ribbon. Tolya laid a *khadak* [Buryat/Mongolian cloth, given to communicate respect] on the knees of the great lama and touched his dry, but still soft hands. From the body came the aroma of incense. 'It was a little frightening when I touched him', said the wrestler. 'But I felt the persistent smell of incense from his body for a long time afterwards – in the monastery, and in the evening at the hotel, when I was sitting on my own in front of the television. A lama told me it was a blessing.' (*Inform Polis*, June 9, 2004: p. 11.)

This article presents both Tolya's experience and the Buryat beliefs that have conditioned it as unquestionable facets of contemporary everyday life. It offers its Buryat audience the satisfaction of seeing a subjective experience of their ethnic beliefs both expressed and celebrated in the mass media – rather than these beliefs making rare appearances as an 'exotic' contrast with the dominant

[25] Itigelov, or Etigelov, is understood by Buddhists to have reached an advanced stage of Enlightenment, revealed by the intact state – the incorruptibility – of his corporeal remains.

Russian worldview, as in the federal mass media, or being adapted into a political communication process, as in *Buryatia*.

The subjects performing the Buryat rituals are always portrayed as positive characters, whose values accord with those generally connected to the rituals themselves. This representation in turn reflects common understandings about traditional Buryat culture. In the example just quoted, Tolya comes across as humble and pious, despite his great strength and achievements, with a strong attachment to his homeland and people (*narod*); his people are the Buryat rather than the inhabitants of the Republic in general, as the following quotation shows:

> 'Remember, Tolya, you were born, live and will die a Buryat,' [the Khambo Lama] said. 'You will never become a Japanese. You wrestlers symbolize the body and strength of our people. If you think like a Japanese, you will never overcome a Japanese. You need to think and act like a Buryat.'
>
> In order to do this, the Khambo Lama advised the athlete to come home more often, to regain his strength. He should eat *borgoiskiy* mutton in Dzhida, go to Zakamniy to collect spirit, to Aga to find out the cultural practices, and to Oloy, the motherland of his ancestors in Ust' Orda, to thank the earth for the strength she awarded the Mikhakhanov clan.
>
> 'If you lose, we all lose. You aren't just your parents' son, but the son of your people.' (*Inform Polis*, June 9, 2004: p. 11.)

Tolya listens respectfully to the advice given by the Khambo Lama, who in turn is represented as wise and authoritative. Together they act out an idealised relationship between Buddhist teacher and pupil, which corresponds to the traditional Buryat respect for teachers and scholars that was often referred to in my presence. In this way, the Buryat and their culture are celebrated by their portrayal according to a specifically Buryat value system. In contrast to

Buryatia's articles, this celebration happens for its own sake: Buryat culture and values are being given an intrinsic worth, instead of being celebrated as the manifestation of an overarching concept of ethnicity and culture.

Other characteristics of *Inform Polis*' features on Buryat culture suggest that they are orientated towards a target audience that has been prevented both from feeling they understand Buryat culture, and from reconciling it with their Russianised way of life. *Inform Polis* extends its representation of Buryat culture by combining its public expression with informative details about the rituals themselves, which are incorporated into the text as brief asides to those who may not be in the know, as in the following example: "The sportsmen were trying to knock out skittles and *lasti* (a target in the shape of a tassel – **auth.**), lying on the square 40 metres away from the line of shooting." (*Inform Polis,* September 22, 2004: p. 11). Such details may be a way of helping the Russian audience understand the piece, but they also tactfully inform Buryats who may be ignorant of their traditions.

Indeed, many examples in the sample showed the ways *Inform Polis* helps its audience with elements of Buryat culture of which they may have no experience, such as a feature on a traditional sports tournament held in Inner Mongolia, celebrating the festival of *Sevden*, or the coming of summer (*Inform Polis*, June 30, 2004: p. 19). The piece both celebrates and romanticises the Buryats, Evenk and Mongols who take part in the games. The Buryats and Evenk are taken to be those who emigrated to Mongolia and China at the beginning of the twentieth century, to escape both the Tsarist and Soviet governments. These communities have managed to continue their pre-revolutionary cultures and ways of life to a much greater extent than the Buryats

and Evenk who remained on Russian territory. The following quotation describes part of the games:

> The horse games started. Young men took part, under the guidance of a strong grey-bearded man in a cowboy hat – popular headwear here. First, the horsemen spiritedly showed off their horse-riding skills [*dzhigitovali*]: at a full gallop they threw themselves flat onto their horses, and turned around the saddle. They were all ordinary shepherds, not circus performers or jockeys. After the warm-up, the "cowboy" threw a weight into the circle. A reckless circling began. Neighing of horses, clouds of dust, cries from the horsemen and roaring from the crowd. Eventually, the most dashing tore himself from the medley and, holding his trophy aloft, galloped away at will. But they didn't let him go far, and soon they were again lifting the weight from the ground, frenziedly tearing it away from each other… At last the whooping cavalcade took itself off into the distance. (*Inform Polis*, June 30, 2004: p. 19.)

The Buryat in this festival clearly have a different culture and way of life from *Inform Polis*' urban Buryat readers. This article, along with others, offers an imaginative strategy to cope with this contradiction by incorporating its idealised representations of Buryat traits into the reportage of a real occasion, which itself is framed as an event *Inform Polis*' readership would recognise. The *Sevden* festival is presented as a non-Russian version of a typical post-Soviet holiday-cum-sports tournament: the article's form corresponds closely to the reportage of a Buddhist sports tournament in Buryatia, and is in fact written by the same author (*Inform Polis*, September 22, 2004: p. 11).

This mixture of common ideals with events or experiences the audience can relate to puts *Inform Polis*' representations of Buryat culture and life into an imaginative realm, blurring the boundaries between ideals and reality, as well as

past and present. The reader is given the opportunity to conflate their own Buryat identity with the article's idealised subjects. This article finishes with a quotation that reconciles the contemporary urban Buryat experience with traditional culture: "'How similar and at the same time dissimilar are the two holidays – *Sevden* and *Surkharban* [a traditional Buryat sports tournament]', said a citizen of Ulan Ude, Mariya Badmayeva" (*Inform Polis*, June 30, 2004: p. 19). *Inform Polis* thus offers its readership a way of imagining their Buryat identity that sidesteps its dissonance with modern life.

Inform Polis' content has other distinctive characteristics, which contain implications about both its Buryat influence, and the set of attitudes that produces it. They suggest that this influence creates a predisposition for *Inform Polis* to espouse a particular combination of ideas, which must be acceptable to both *Inform Polis*' journalists and the audience that pays for their articles. These ideas are expressed in other parts of the Russian Federation's public sphere, in various forms. However, their specific combination in *Inform Polis* indicates that *Inform Polis*' journalists and readers entertain conceptions of the Russian Federation and the world that contrast with those commonly expressed in the Federation's mainstream mass media.

Inform Polis' references to federal actors, or to the Federation itself, tend to distance federal structures from the Republic, in contrast to *Pyatnitsa Plyus*, which does not present such a clear distinction between republican and federal actors. For example, *Inform Polis* refers to federal-level, Moscow-based companies as the 'Muscovites' (*moskvichi*) in its headlines, presenting them as a separate group (*Inform Polis*, June 9, 2004: p. 5; 22 September, 2004: p. 11).

Inform Polis' distinction between Republic and Federation reflects that made by the commercial newspapers in Sakha (Yakutia). However, this detached relationship with the federal government is combined with an unusually positive attitude towards foreigners. *Inform Polis* regularly publishes articles from foreign news sources that criticise aspects of Vladimir Putin's administration, such as its policy in Chechnya. The other newspapers in the study ignored these pieces – while the Moscow-based publications *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and *Argumenti i Fakty* cited them as evidence of Western hostility towards Russia, suggesting the Beslan hostage taking had been organised by a Western coalition.

The comments about the Beslan hostage taking in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and *Argumenti i Fakty* are typical of these newspapers' strikingly negative treatment of foreigners, and in particular Americans and Western Europeans. Their stories highlight the threat apparently posed by a rich, hostile West, repeating ideas likely to have been circulating in the public sphere during the Cold War, while conflating the Russian Federation with the Russian ethnic group. For example, *Argumenty i Fakty* consistently associated the Russian Federation's population, and Vladimir Putin himself, with the Russian Orthodox Church, repeating a narrative about the successful repatriation of Russian Orthodox holy objects from the West. The photograph accompanying one such article exemplifies the link *Argumenty i Fakty* makes between the repatriation, the icon itself and the Russian people's ancient, tragic past. The picture of Pope John Paul II showing Putin the icon (see Figure 4.3 on the opposite page) allows Putin to represent both the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church. In this way, the article ascribes a contemporary relevance to the classic Slavophile conception of Russia as a unique, sacred nation, held at bay by its Western

European enemies.[26] *Argumenty i Fakty*'s image of the Russian Federation and its people thus places them firmly within the European Russian cultural tradition.

Inform Polis' contrasting representation of the Russian Federation and its international relations suggests that those who read and write it accept a different way of thinking about both the Russian Federation and the outside world, which is more focused on the conception of Buryatia among potentially friendly foreign others than on that of the Russian Federation and its enemies. This in turn implies that even the heavily Russianised urban Buryats have a more direct identification with the Republic than the Federation.

Inform Polis' handling of the spiritual realm also seems to respond to a distinctive interest in spiritual forces on the part of its target audience. The following quotation epitomises *Inform Polis*' representation of supernatural forces. It consists of the first two paragraphs from an article published between the two sample periods, on Alar' Region, which is part of the former Ust-Ordysnk Buryat Autonomous *Okrug* in Irkutsk *Oblast'*:

> But it seems that soon the unhindered wanderings of various spirits and apparitions, which frighten the peaceful population, will come to an end. In any case, precisely this blessing is expected by many of this land's inhabitants from the appearance, or more exactly the resurrection, of Alar's Buddhist temple, built in 1811, and destroyed in the 30s of the last century by the Bolsheviks. Today on the piece of land, re-sanctified this summer by a lama especially invited for the occasion, the place has been marked out for the building of a small *suburgan* [a sacred Buddhist sculpture]. The *dugan* [single prayer-hall] will be here. And in a new place in the regional centre Kutulik, a *datsan* [a temple complex]. The idea of the "return of Buddha" belongs to the inhabitants of Alar' region, now living in Buryatia. In this way they want to show their filial appreciation to their motherland.

[26] Alexander Agadjanian's study reveals a similar tendency for mainstream federal newspapers to associate the Russian Orthodox Church with Russian national identity (Agadjanian, 2001).

> And meanwhile the inhabitants of this most black-earthed and fertile, strawberry-filled, roadless, dependent on wells, superstitious and mystical country are restoring the houses destroyed in the strongest July hurricane; boiling dozens of litres of jam; keenly discussing the Okrug's complex political situation [the author is likely to be referring to the merger of Ust-Ordynsk with Irkutsk *Oblast'*]; collecting mushrooms and hay, and recounting to visitors the new and old legends, with which this land overflows... (*Inform Polis*, August 11, 2004: p. 27)

The following article consists of six small stories about Alar' region and its spirits, related from the point of view of different individuals. As a whole, the article celebrates the restoration of the region's Buddhist temple (*dugan*), and its capacity to remove the region's unclean spirits – while offering the reader a series of pleasantly exciting, rather than shocking, ghost stories.

In contrast with the Russian federal newspapers, the subjects of this and similar articles are presented sympathetically, rather than as superstitious or freakish. The article appears under the recurring rubric The People's Week (*narodnaya nedelya*): as this would suggest, the individuals it describes are members of the ordinary 'people' (*narod*). A nice touch is the story told from the perspective of a three-year-old girl, who has spent the summer with her grandmother in Alar', and is very pleased about all the strawberry jam she and her family are going to take back to Ulan Ude. The inhabitants of Ulan Ude generally go to the regions for the summer if they can, to avoid the town's heat, dust and pollution, so that most of *Inform Polis*' readership would be able to relate Mila and her family's situation to their immediate experience.

The article's subjects are all Buryat, with the exception of a Cossack who married a Buryat, and who is presented as having thoroughly absorbed

himself into the surrounding Buryat community. Their experiences are conditioned by what are implied to be specifically Buryat beliefs. For example, the journalist specifies that a "house that eats its owner" is called *ezedee edideg sool* in Buryat. However, the colloquial speech of the articles' subjects is combined with stylised language forms that sound as if they come from fairy tales, such as the following sentence, "When night descends to earth and the forces of evil hold undivided sway, rarely does a dare-devil, even while tipsy, venture to walk past that house". In doing so, the article blurs the boundary between the ordinary and the imagined, in the same way as the account of the *Sevden* festival described above. It places its subjects in an ambiguous but attractive imaginative space, between fact and fiction, which the sympathetic reader can enter and enjoy. The picturesque but familiar inhabitants of Alar', and their unselfconsciously animist Buddhist beliefs, are being presented to the reader as a pleasurable way of conceptualising Buryatia's ordinary people (*narod*), including by extension the readers themselves. This implies an assumption on the part of the journalist that the audience is able to engage with these beliefs in a way that would prevent them from dismissing the article – and possibly also *Inform Polis* itself – as sensationalist nonsense. The spirits and ghosts are carefully placed between the real and the imagined, instead of appearing as shockingly paranormal. *Inform Polis*' pieces put into context the unquestioning belief in the existence of Zakamensk's area spirits on the part of Barguzin's youth policy expert. Together, they suggest a distinctive general capacity to accept supernatural forces as part of reality, which suggests that the pre-Soviet Buryat beliefs appearing in *Barguzinskaya Pravda* have been adapted into an urban Buryat **culture**. **Both Hürelbaatar and Humphrey note an**

eagerness among even the poorer Buryat inhabitants of Ulan Ude to donate to religious organisations: they contend that many Buryats are more willing to spend money on their spiritual lives than to pay their public utility bills (Hürelbaatar, 2007: p. 138; Humphrey, 2007: p. 197).

However, the 'unclean spirits' described in this article differ from the area spirits mentioned in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*. There is thus a qualitative difference between *Inform Polis*' and *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s representations of Buryat culture and spirituality, beyond the difference in focus that might be expected between a republican-level and a regional newspaper. The direct relationships between individuals, their clans, and their area's spirits, which extend backwards into the distant past, and which were traditionally an important part of Buryat personhood, appear in *Inform Polis*' narratives to have become scrambled.

Inform Polis' article gives the impression that the local population have little knowledge about the individual spirits, their stories and personalities, or capacity to influence daily life. According to *Barguzinskaya Pravda* on the other hand, the inhabitants of Barguzin and Zakamensk use their detailed historical knowledge of their area spirits to find ways of avoiding being harmed by them (for example, the account of Zakamensk's pregnant women wearing male belts) (*Barguzinskaya Pravda*, June 14, 2004; p. 3). *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s spirits are presented as being both worthy of respect, and capable of benefiting the local population. The spirits in *Inform Polis*' article, by contrast, appear as mysterious and hostile supernatural phenomena, with a greater resemblance to the spiritual forces described by mainstream Russian newspapers. For example, the Alar' "house that eats its owner", is built on a site that gives it an "unfavourable *feng*-

shui". Everyone who has lived in it has died mysteriously; its current owner refuses to occupy it, and intends to give it to Alar's future lama, who will be able to drive out the "unclean spirit" (*nechist'*). The lama's role in *Inform Polis* is to cast the spirits out, while *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s lama behaves as a mediator between the spirits and the humans, as when he asks Zakamensk's population to stop getting drunk and leaving litter at sacred sites.

Similarly, in the example cited earlier the Khambo Lama's advice to Tolya indicates that he conceives of spiritual influences as having a more generalised nature and effect than those of *Barguzinskaya Pravda*. He tells Tolya to thank the "earth" (*zemlya*), rather than the specific spirits that inhabit Oloy, and he identifies Tolya as belonging to the Buryat "people", rather than to his particular clan (*Inform Polis,* June 9, 2004; p. 11). These differences in conception suggest that he, or the journalist who is quoting him, do not perceive individual Buryats to have the direct relationships with spirits, ancestors and the rest of their clan implied by *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s articles. His statements also present the Buryat ethnic group as a unifying ideal to which loyalty should be directed, displaying a concern with Buryat ethnicity in the abstract that does not appear in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*. This abstract concept of the Buryat ethnic group has a spiritual dimension, firstly from the spiritual benefits the Buryat land and culture can bring, and secondly from its endorsement by a religious authority (the Khambo Lama).

All the *Inform Polis* features illustrate the association *Inform Polis* consistently makes between spirituality and Russian or Buryat cultural practice, in such a way that ethnic culture is presented as a phenomenon within which the transcendent is encountered. In particular, *Inform Polis* ascribes a primordial

spiritual power to the Buryat land and people, as the Khambo Lama's speech to Tolya exemplifies. Meanwhile, the report of the *Sevden* tournament suggests that its Buryat, Evenk and Mongol participants are in some way 'pure', without having been 'polluted' by civilisation – and by extension, the civilising Soviet Russians. It describes the women's faces as "dark and weather-beaten, never having known the artifices of makeup"; the tournament participants have retained the "irrepressible spirit of the wild nomads" (*neukrotimaya dukha dikikh kochevnikov*) (*Inform Polis*, June 30, 2004; p. 19). This purity is connected to their having retained their close relationship with the earth and its spiritual power, implying that this relationship is a primordial characteristic of non-Russian culture. These articles imply a close relationship between the Republic's territory and the Buryats, which the Russians cannot share. This idea also occurs in other articles, in various forms. For example, the Buryat teacher who was killed during the Beslan siege is described as having a "steppe" character: she is "a person of few words, restrained, very attentive to the elderly" (*Inform Polis*, September 15, 2004; p. 5).

Meanwhile, the idealised wild, primordial Mongolian and Buryat 'spirit', closely connected to the land, can appear in other parts of Buryatia's public sphere. A highly publicised and popular display of Buryat folk music and dancing I attended, called "Spirit of our Forefathers" (*Ugaym Sulde*, Bur.), urged its audience to reconnect with the ancient Buryat spirit. The *Inform Polis* pieces do not however express any kind of Buryat nationalist agenda; the specifically Buryat relationship with the Republic's territory they describe does not carry the implication that the Buryat have a greater right to occupy it.

The different understanding of the relationship between spirits and the human world that exists within *Inform Polis*' discursive space could correspond to a difference in attitude between *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s rural audience, and *Inform Polis*' largely urban one. The spiritual beliefs that appear in *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s pages come through incidentally, in articles that have other political or administrative functions. *Inform Polis*' presentation of the spiritual sphere meanwhile is a response to its conception of what will please its target audience. The generalised ideas about the spiritual and religious sphere that result would be likely to correlate with attitudes widely held among *Inform Polis*' urban Buryat audience, who would have ruptured, or at least heavily complicated, their connections with their clans and area spirits when they moved to the towns.

Contemporary urbanisation seems to be changing Buryat beliefs, as individuals are exposed to the new ideas and demands that accompany their change of lifestyle. However, this process of change seems to incorporate and adapt older ideas, rather than replace them completely, as the continuing influence of the traditional Buryat animist mindset over *Inform Polis* shows. In addition, the articles quoted from all three newspapers evince a deep respect for past tradition. *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s youth worker applauds Zakamensk's use of traditional practice; *Buryatia* depicts traditional culture as the source of profound spiritual knowledge, while *Inform Polis* presents attractive, idealised accounts of traditional cultural events. This continuity implies an interchange of ideas between different regions and communities. **Manzanova contends that urbanisation is increasing the distinction between Russian and Buryat cultures, and generating 'ruralised' urban lifestyles (Manzanova, 2007).**

Large numbers of rural migrants in Ulan Ude, with a relatively low exposure to Russianised attitudes, are swamping the urban population. However, Anna Buyanova's study of the way young rural Buryats adapt to studying at Ulan Ude's higher education establishments shows that rural incomers have to change their language and habits to some extent, to avoid becoming marginalised (Buyanova, 2009). The evidence in the newspapers of an interaction between rural and urban attitudes supports Buyanova's findings.

The linking of ethnic culture with the spiritual realm correlates with the ideas occurring in *Buryatia*, suggesting that there may have been some communication of these ideas between popular and elite discursive spheres. *Inform Polis* adapts the Buryat nationalist promotion of a Buryat spiritual tradition into a representation of Buryat ethnic culture that connects the individual to the spiritual by virtue of their commitment to their Buryat identity. In this way, a Buryat identity is implied to carry a transcending spiritual and moral significance. *Inform Polis* must be creating or reproducing attractive ideas about what it means to be Buryat, because its product is commercially viable. This raises the possibility that a conception of a pan-Buryat identity with a spiritual significance may be becoming increasingly important to the Republic's Buryat population, corroborating the sociological research on Buryat identity.[27] **Hürelbaatar contends that religious practice has become a means for Buryats to express their national identity, and thus that the two are associated – although he does not suggest that the conceptions of Buryat identity themselves are equated with religious belief (Hürelbaatar, 2007).**

[27] This research provides evidence that a pan-Buryat identity has for the first time acquired an importance for individuals (Yelayeva, 2004).

Inform Polis does not however repeat *Buryatia*: the spiritual power ascribed to the Buryat land, people and religion has a direct and immediate effect on the subjects concerned, rather than being confined to an abstracted aesthetic or historical realm. *Inform Polis* is combining Buryat nationalist ideas with pre-Soviet spiritual beliefs, in a complicated interaction of pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet attitudes.

Conclusion:

The product that *Inform Polis* is offering implies the existence of a clear perception among urban Buryats that they are members of an ethnic group, with a history and trajectory of development distinct from that of the Russians, despite the ambiguities involved. This leads to the continuing development of Buryat identity and culture, as part of an imperative to align this perception with the rapid and homogenising changes brought about by the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. *Inform Polis* itself could well have a role in this cultural reorientation process, by repeating the narratives that attract its target audience and thereby encouraging the popular assimilation of these ideas.

According to *Inform Polis*' representation, Buryat culture is connected to a primordial relationship with a spiritualised landscape more than it is to the republican state. Buryat identity and culture could therefore be becoming increasingly detached from a specific polity, reflecting the population's continuing lack of involvement with the political sphere. The abstracted, transcendental significance of Buryat identity would be likely to increase, if the merging of Buryatia into its surrounding regions were to remove the Buryat

titular state structure altogether. The possibility of this development in turn raises questions about the long-term effects of the federal government's centralisation policies on Buryat culture and identity. *Inform Polis*' content suggests that many Buryats will not develop a clear identification with the Federal state – especially considering the strong association often made in the public sphere between the Russian Federation and specifically Russian or Soviet culture. As an Ust-Ordynsk farm worker is reported to have said in a 2002 edition of *Inform Polis*,

> We, the Alar' Buryats, are between Heaven and Earth. Regions [*oblasti*] and territories [*okrugi*] aren't necessary. Let them merge them. (*Inform Polis*, September 4, 2002: p. 9)

The republican government's attempts publicly to establish its connection with the spirituality supposedly inherent in ethnic cultural tradition could be reproducing, and thus reinforcing, the tendency to connect ethnicity with the spiritually transcendent. In this way, the government's self-publicity has the effect of reinforcing the importance of a spiritualised Buryat identity, despite the republican government's concern with managing its population's affiliation with their ethnic group. If the post-Republican government were to have equal difficulty in creating a positive relationship with its Buryat citizens, it would risk the increasing emotional and spiritual significance of Buryat culture acquiring the capacity to generate overt hostility.

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Chapter Five

Regional newspapers and political elites in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

Introduction:

In a similar way to Chapter Three, this chapter is concerned with explaining Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers and context, in preparation for the discussion of Sakha culture and identity in Chapter Six. It builds on Chapter Three's discussion of the difference between government-sponsored and commercial newspapers, which applies to both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), to present Sakha (Yakutia)'s complex political situation. The first section is concerned with the quantitative analysis, and the differences it revealed between the government-owned daily *Yakutia*, which belongs to the republican executive, and the commercial weeklies *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy*. The second part of the first section compares Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspaper material with the newspapers *Buryatia*, *Inform Polis* and *Pyatnitsa Plyus*, in order to elucidate Sakha (Yakutia)'s distinctive political and economic context. Section Two uses the qualitative interpretation of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspaper discourse to build up a more detailed picture of political practice in Sakha (Yakutia), and of the relationship between the republican and federal administrations.

Section 5.1: The characteristics of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers and politics

Section 5.1.1: Introduction to Sakha (Yakutia)'s regional newspapers

The analysis of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers shows that their ownership exerts a decisive influence over their function and content, as in Buryatia. A similar broad distinction can be made between government-owned newspapers, and the newspapers produced by those primarily seeking to run a profitable business.

Table 5.1 shows the frequencies with which different functions occurred in all three fully coded newspapers – the government-owned daily *Yakutia*, and the commercial newspapers *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy*. The names of the codes used to mark these functions refer to what the article offers the reader, for example, 'Useful Information', 'Information', 'Celebration' or 'Human Interest'. The code 'Ceremonial Occasion' was used to mark articles publicising major public events, equivalent to those occurring in Buryatia.

Code:	***Yakutia*** *N = 491*	***Nashe Vremya*** *N = 187*	***Yakutsk Vecherniy*** *N = 302*
Information	64.6 (317)	60 (112)	71.5 (216)
Celebration	53.8 (264)	21.4 (40)	10.6 (32)
Human Interest	35.2 (173)	38.5 (72)	56.3 (170)
Political *Aktsiya*	24.6 (121)	17.6 (33)	12.6 (38)
Ceremonial Occasion	36.0 (177)	25.7 (48)	13.9 (42)
Satire	*n/a*	19.8 (37)	11.3 (34)

Table 5.1: The percentages of articles coded with 'Information', 'Celebration', 'Human Interest', 'Political *Aktsiya*', 'Ceremonial Occasion' and 'Satire' (the figures in brackets are the number of articles to which the codes were attached; *N* = the number of articles in the sample; *n/a* = not applicable)

As the table shows, a much higher proportion of articles had a 'celebration' function in *Yakutia* than in the commercial newspapers (53.8 per cent in *Yakutia*, as against 21.4 and 10.6 per cent in *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* respectively). This difference is due to the large number of articles in *Yakutia* devoted to praising individuals, government initiatives or public events. Government initiatives in particular are emphasised in *Yakutia*, as is shown by the higher occurrence of the code 'Political *Aktsiya*' in *Yakutia* (*aktsiya* is the Russian word for an action or initiative). This code was used on 24.6 per cent of *Yakutia*'s articles, compared to 17.6 and 12.6 per cent of those in *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* respectively. State-sponsored ceremonial occasions also feature more often in *Yakutia*: 36.0 per cent of its articles were marked 'Ceremonial Occasion', compared to 25.7 and 13.9 per cent in *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* respectively.

Both samples of *Yakutia* contained series of articles on the major state occasions occurring during the sample period. For example, Sakha (Yakutia)'s child sports festival, The Children of Asia (*Deti Azii*), was mentioned 27 times over the month of June in a variety of pieces, many of which specifically concerned the preparations for this event. The second sample contained extensive coverage of the Vilyuisk hydroelectric power station's opening on

September 8, including a day-by-day countdown from August 28. This set of tendencies implies that *Yakutia* was being used to showcase the activities that the republican government wished to bring before the public, in a similar way to Buryatia's government-owned newspaper *Buryatia*.

Code:	*Yakutia* *N* = 491	*Nashe Vremya* *N* = 187	*Yakutsk Vecherniy* *N* = 302
Negative for Elites	3.1 (15)	18.7 (35)	26.8 (81)
Environment Crisis	17.5 (86)	10.2 (19)	6.3 (19)
Economic Crisis	12.6 (62)	17.6 (33)	14.2 (43)
Crime Crisis	6.1 (30)	10.2 (19)	16.2 (49)

Table 5.2: The percentages of articles coded as 'Environment Crisis', 'Negative for Elites', 'Economic Crisis' and 'Crime Crisis' (the figures in brackets are the number of articles to which the codes were attached; *N* = the number of articles in the sample)

Yakutia's mention of problems is at a comparable level to that of the commercial newspapers, as Table 5.2 shows. *Yakutia*'s most frequently used negative code was 'Environment Crisis', which was attached to 17.5 per cent of *Yakutia*'s articles. The negative code that was used most often in the analysis of *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* was 'Negative for Elites', marking uncomplimentary references to prominent individuals or organisations: it was attached to 26.8 and 18.7 per cent of these newspapers' articles respectively. In general, *Yakutia* has explanations for Sakha (Yakutia)'s problems that differ from the commercial newspapers, softening the negative impressions they create

about the Republic's government. Difficulties were less likely to be presented as inadequacies on the part of elite groups. The code 'Negative for Elites', was applied to 3.1 per cent of *Yakutia*'s articles; any criticism in *Yakutia* tended to be directed towards municipal administrations, corporations, or federal-level actors, rather than the Republic's legislative and executive bodies (*Il Tumen* and the *Pravitel'stvo*), or the President, Vyacheslav Shtyrov. For example, one article finds fault with the republican electricity company Yakutenergo for cutting off 70 small settlements, when only two in the sub-region concerned owed them money (*Yakutia* June 16, 2004: p. 5).

Certain issues were often presented within the framework of a proposed solution. For example, 44.2 per cent of the articles marked 'Environmental Crisis' were also marked 'Political *Aktsiya*', meaning that they referred to accounts of the government's measures to deal with Sakha (Yakutia)'s difficult terrain and climate – such as the annual drive to ferry essential supplies up to the far north during the summer. 27 of the 38 articles coded as 'Environmental Crisis' and 'Political *Aktsiya*' were reports on the progress of this activity. At least one such report usually appeared on the front page of every broadsheet edition, constantly reminding the regular reader of the republican government's efforts.

This emphasis on government initiative presents the Republic as having a concerned and active administration, aware that Sakha (Yakutia) is a challenging place to inhabit and govern. It also indicates that *Yakutia* is designed to project a consistent impression of the Republic and its government, in addition to providing a space for informative articles and political discussion.

Buryatia and *Yakutia* are essentially extensions of their Republics'

executive organs of government. They both act simultaneously as channels of communication between the government's different organisations, and as positive publicity for their respective administrations. They facilitate the controlled discussion of various political and economic issues as part of their functioning, in addition to publishing what they present as appeals, criticism or praise from their Republics' citizens.

The government-owned sub-regional newspaper *Erkeeyi* resembles Buryatia's sub-regional newspaper *Barguzinskaya Pravda* (also described in Chapter Three). *Erkeeyi* is Sakha-language, and is owned and published by the administration of Megino-Kangalass Region (*ulus*, Sakha).[28] It contained a similar mix of local government news, occasional criticism, and input from its readership, and reveals an even more marked difference in the lifestyles of *ulus* and Yakutsk populations than Buryatia's equivalent contrast, as might be expected from Sakha (Yakutia)'s enormous territory.

The commercial newspapers' representations of Sakha (Yakutia)'s everyday life differ greatly from the overall impression produced by *Yakutia*, creating a similar contrast between commercial and government-owned newspapers to that in Buryatia. They also present Sakha (Yakutia) within the specific genres, narratives and themes that constitute their product. Both *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* base their claims for the readers' attention to a large extent on the offer of an unofficial, alternative perspective on Sakha (Yakutia)'s politics.

As Table 5.1 shows, 11.3 and 19.8 per cent of the articles in *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* respectively were coded with 'Satire'. These

[28] Most sub-regions in Sakha (Yakutia) use the Sakha word *ulus* in their official names, rather than the Russian word *raion*. I will therefore refer to Sakha (Yakutia)'s sub-regions as *ulusy*.

figures translate into a regular reader encountering satire 34 times over *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s two-month sample period, which contained eight weekly newspapers, and 37 times over *Nashe Vremya*'s. Both newspapers contained pages or columns specifically devoted to satirical stories about Sakha (Yakutia)'s politicians, such as *Nashe Vremya*'s Itar-Kha-Tass page. Itar-Kha-Tass' author uses a smokescreen by presenting damaging allegations within 'news stories' about the fictional VseYelensko-Khindigirskiy Region (*Krai*), which is clearly intended to represent Sakha (Yakutia). VseYelensko-Khindigirskiy *Krai* has a Governor called Vyacheslav Shtykov, who as the word *shtyk* (bayonet) in his name implies retains the aggressive techniques he assimilated during his "delinquent youth" (*Nashe Vremya* June 18, 2004: p. 34). *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s satire varied greatly in the extent to which it attacked the republican government. The column "A Week with Mikhail Zastenko" portrayed Sakha (Yakutia)'s politicians as simple and ridiculous rather than immoral – while Zastenko's "Ministers' Stories" (*Deputatskiye Istorii*) juxtaposed articles from the Republic's official code of conduct for ministers with humorous accounts of the code being broken, which showed the ministers concerned to be thoroughly corrupt and incompetent.

The code 'Satire' also marked the frequent appearance of satirical, or sarcastic, comments in both these newspapers' news articles. For example, the introductory paragraph to *Nashe Vremya*'s report of a press conference on how the Ministry of Emergency Situations had coped with Sakha (Yakutia)'s spring flooding contained the following:

> After a short, but inspiring film, colourfully describing the heroic feat of the rescuers in the spirit of ‘days and nights at open hearths, the Motherland never closed her eyes’ [a line from

> a popular song from the Second World War, 'Victory Day' (*Den Pobedy*)], the 'extraordinary' minister informed us that far from everything in the process of ice-drifting had gone smoothly, and that the absence of sensational news from riverside expanses was simply the result of his department's good work. (*Nashe Vremya*, June 11, 2004: p. 6.)

As their production of satire suggests, both *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* are predicated on the existence of populations who are interested in politics, although they regard politicians with suspicion. These populations are likely to be based around Yakutsk, since the Republic's huge size makes transporting newspapers to the more distant *ulusy* prohibitively expensive.

Yakutsk Vecherniy's target audience seems less concerned with high-quality analysis and professional journalism than that of *Nashe Vremya*, as is indicated by *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s greater use of 'human interest': this code was attached to 56.3 per cent of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s articles, as against 38.5 per cent of *Nashe Vremya*'s. 'Human Interest' articles offer readers an attractive emotional experience, rather than an intellectually convincing account of current affairs.

The high proportion (71.5 per cent) of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s articles coded as 'Information' shows its emphasis on supplying news, even if the quality of this information was extremely variable. Indeed, *Yakutsk Vecherniy* contained evidence of an unusually relaxed attitude on the part of its journalists towards maintaining their professional standards, which corroborated the complaints I heard in Yakutsk about its capacity to misinform. It could report statistical information incorrectly – for example, its account of the republican government's quarterly report on Sakha (Yakutia)'s budget claimed the budget deficit to be 1.9 billion rubles, while *Yakutia* and *Nashe Vremya* described it as

"more than two billion" and 2.1 billion rubles respectively (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 25, 2004: p. 8; *Yakutia* June 12, 2004: p. 2; *Nashe Vremya* June 11, 2004: p. 3). The sample from *Yakutsk Vecherniy* produced the highest number of basic editorial errors out of all the newspapers, such as omitting to put an article's page number next to the headline, cartoon and introductory paragraph that advertised it on the front page of the edition, as the illustration in Figure 5.1 on the opposite page shows (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, September 17, 2004: p. 1).

Nashe Vremya was described to me by its journalists as 'the newspaper government officials and professionals enjoy reading', in contrast with *Yakutia*, the newspaper they 'have to read'. Its language and arguments corroborate this claim, in that they are of a high enough quality to satisfy a well-educated individual with a genuine interest in politics, while retaining an attractive level of accessibility and humour. An example is its account of the budget meeting, which described in detail Sakha (Yakutia)'s budget deficit and state debt, and the republican government's attempts to address the issue. However, the journalist also mentioned his personal impression of the meeting:

> Sometimes – please can those respected people's representatives forgive *NV*'s reviewer! – a strange feeling arose: it was as if third-year schoolchildren [aged about 10] were giving an instructor of higher mathematics trick questions, and then were trying to catch him out for not knowing the subject. (*Nashe Vremya*, June 11, 2004: p. 3.)

The comparison between *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s and *Nashe Vremya*'s handling of Sakha (Yakutia)'s problematic budget exemplifies clearly the difference between them. While *Nashe Vremya* published a report of the discussion between Sakha (Yakutia)'s executive and legislative on the

Republic's budget two days after the meeting took place, on June 11, *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s feature on the Republic's budget came out on June 25, a fortnight later. This suggests that *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s editorial team did not expect their readers to have the awareness of the meeting or problem that would make *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s article seem unacceptably late. *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s piece contains several damaging allegations, claiming for example that the executive had introduced additional outgoings after the budget had been agreed (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 25, 2004: p. 8). It provided basic evidence for these allegations in the form of what looked like officially produced figures, without specifying their source, or drawing out their implications. As a whole, the article communicated a general impression that various state actors had been using budget funds for their own interests, as the cartoon illustrating the piece shows; this cartoon can be found in Figure 5.2 on the opposite page. The article contained several unsupported statements, and occasionally also colloquial language. The difference between *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s and *Nashe Vremya*'s linguistic styles can be seen from the quotations in Textbox 5.1.

Yakutsk Vecherniy	*Nashe Vremya*
An unstable economic situation has arisen in the Republic. Less and less tax is coming into the treasury (by 3.3 million rubles), but unplanned outgoings are getting bigger and bigger. The budget's credits aren't being returned, and the percentages on them aren't being paid back. And where can you get money from, if the cupboard's empty? In general, in comparison to 2002 the budget deficit has increased 834.1 million rubles and was 1.9 billion rubles. We are living in debt. And how that's going to turn out for the [Republic's] inhabitants is clear. There's no need to wait for anything good. For example, the big debts in the distribution of "Social policy" [sic] have today given rise to the threat that invalids can't get money for their journeys to their places of cure. This requires an operative correction to the state budget of 188 million rubles. And where to get them from, if...? (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 25, 2004: p. 8.)	At the next meeting the Minister of Finance Ernst Beryezkin, reporting on the execution of the 2003 budget to the deputies, brought in much more large-scale and impressive figures: the income of the budget, which had been 'defined' four times, was realised at 103.5 per cent, and the outgoings at 104 per cent. As a result the income was 33.4 billion rubles, and the outgoings were 35.5 billion rubles, leaving a deficit of 2.1 billion rubles, which was financed by the residues of accounts, credits, loans, securities, and also from the revenues of the sale of state property. (*Nashe Vremya*, June 11, 2004: p. 3.)

Textbox 5.1: A comparison of *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy*

In sum, the content analysis of these three newspapers shows a wide variation in Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspaper discourse, which creates the opportunity of

building up a picture of Sakha (Yakutia)'s context through comparing and contrasting the newspaper material.

Section 5.1.2: The differences between Sakha (Yakutia)'s and Buryatia's political spheres, as shown by their regional newspapers

The official publicity reports in *Yakutia* show that its politicians are much more capable of attempting to make real changes than those of Buryatia. The repetitive series of worker's holidays, meetings, presidential visits and reports published by *Buryatia* was varied in *Yakutia* by large-scale independent enterprises, such as the *Deti Azii* children's sports festival, and the building of the hydroelectric power station described above. Table 5.3 illustrates this difference by presenting the proportions of articles marked with the codes 'Celebration' and 'Worker's Holiday'.

Code:	*Buryatia* *N = 371*	*Yakutia* *N* = 491
Celebration	52.3 (194)	53.8 (264)
Worker's Holiday	9.4 (35)	2.2 (11)

Table 5.3: A comparison of the percentages of articles coded as 'Worker's Holiday' and 'Celebration' in the government-sponsored newspapers *Buryatia* and *Yakutia* (the figures in brackets are the number of articles to which the codes were attached; *N* = the number of articles in the sample)

The code 'Worker's Holiday', marking a reference to the professional holidays supposedly celebrated by the entire Russian Federation, was used on 2.2 and 9.4

per cent of *Yakutia*'s and *Buryatia*'s articles respectively, even though roughly equal proportions of these newspapers' articles carried the 'Celebration' code (53.8 and 52.3 per cent respectively). These percentages translate into 11 references to a workers' holiday in *Yakutia* in June 2004, compared with 35 in *Buryatia*. The celebration of federal workers' holidays was replaced to some extent in *Yakutia* by that of ceremonial occasions organised by the republican government.

The language *Yakutia* used in its official articles was more lively, as the following Textbox shows. It contains the headlines and first paragraphs of two accounts of Buryatia's and Sakha (Yakutia)'s responses to Vladimir Putin's presidential message for 2004.

Buryatia	***Yakutia***
Headline: The President's message is the orientator of action	**Headline:** We will resolve all the questions together
First two paragraphs: Another important question was touched upon. The vertical of power is built, and it is necessary to demarcate clearly the functions and powers of all the levels of authority, and increase the responsibility of all the organs of authority. Having heard and discussed the report of the chief federal inspector, the board decided to ensure the working out and acceptance of a plan of measures to fulfil the Message of the President of the RF, to	**First paragraph:** But first the Co-chairman of the *OKS* Council, the Vice-President of the Republic A. K. Akimov, stepped up before the assembled, and spoke at length on certain of the most important questions and exercises that stand before the Social Consultation Council this year. He noted that the beginning of the twenty-first century will go down in history as the time of the development of a multi-party system in Russia. Parliamentary parties are not just a part of the politico-

establish control over the realisation of these plans and to analyse the course of the fulfilling of the main statutes of the Message. (*Buryatia*, June 9, 2004: p. 5)	governing machine, but are also part of civil society, and furthermore the most influential, which means also responsible. In his Message to the Federal Assembly V. Putin marked out in particular the development of a genuine multi-party system and institutions of civil society among the most important exercises, underlining that parties with a federal significance should have a genuine influence in the regions, so as to have an effect on Russia as a whole. The government should create the appropriate conditions for the formation of civil society. And in particular the consolidation of power, social and political forces is the founding condition for the social and economic well being of the country. (*Yakutia*, June 4, 2004: p. 2.)

Textbox 5.2: Textbox comparing official language in *Buryatia* and *Yakutia*

Yakutia's commitment towards the efficient communication of information and discussion goes hand in hand with its intention to supply its audience with up-to-date material, as shown by the rapidity with which it responded to the Beslan hostage taking in comparison with *Buryatia*. *Yakutia*'s first article about Beslan was published on September 3, two days after the crisis started, while *Buryatia*'s first article appeared on September 7. The two quotations in Textbox 5.2 also illustrate the different attitudes *Buryatia* and

Yakutia displayed towards the relationship between federal and republican governments. *Yakutia* showed Sakha (Yakutia)'s politicians to have a much stronger sense of themselves as independent actors within the Russian Federation than those working in Buryatia.

The high level of satire in *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* suggests that these newspapers operate within a complex political hierarchy containing several ambitious and confident competitors. The risk these newspapers take in producing this satire increases their need of elite protection, or a 'roof' (*krysha*). Journalism can be as dangerous a profession in Sakha (Yakutia) as anywhere else in the Russian Federation. A journalist acquaintance of mine was badly beaten up as he left his office; he assumes this was because of something he published, since the motive for the attack was not robbery. I noticed that *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s office has a security guard and bars over its windows, installed after an armed man threatened to storm their building. The presence of satire in Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers implies the existence of several elite actors who are powerful enough to stand in opposition to each other. In contrast, the lack of satire in Buryatia's newspapers indicates the high level of control President Potapov and his circle had over Buryatia's political establishment during his presidency.

Yakutsk Vecherniy and *Nashe Vremya* contained significant proportions of pre-ordered (*zakaznoy*) material. The code 'Zakaz?' refers to pieces that were likely to have been ordered from the newspapers by a politician, in contrast to the advertisements written to look like newspaper articles placed by commercial organisations in both the commercial newspapers. Articles published to order are referred to in Russia as articles published '*na zakaz*' (Koltsova, 2001: p. 318).

Certain articles awakened the suspicion that they were *zakaznyye* when they contrasted with the contentions the newspaper usually made, while containing statements that were obviously useful for their subjects. For example, *Yakutsk Vecherniy* published a double-page interview with Yakutsk's Mayor, Il'ya Mikhal'chuk, which allowed him to express his profound love and concern for Yakutsk, its inhabitants and the Republic in general; this gave a context for his explanation as to why the drive to improve Yakutsk's sewage system had only produced some unpleasant concrete ditches, and for an outline of his plans for the betterment of Yakutsk (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, September 9, 2004: pp. 14–15). The journalist also thanks the Mayor's press service for their "help in preparing the material". The other editions of *Yakutsk Vecherniy* contained several serious allegations about Mikhal'chuk, however. For example, an issue in early June claimed that his newly raised electricity and heating tariffs contravened federal law, that he was forcing the State University's students to spend the summer in their home *ulusy*, to prevent their disturbing the *Deti Azii* games, and that the town administration's property allocation department was corrupt (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 4, 2004: pp. 9, 12–13). In all, 19 and 25 potentially *zakaznyye* pieces appeared in *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* respectively, out of the eight editions each sample contained. In contrast, *Inform Polis*' two-month sample contained only two articles that were likely to have been ordered by their subjects, and it had clearly come to some arrangement with Buryatia's main Buddhist organisation, as Chapter Four described. *Pyatnitsa Plyus* also published two articles that could possibly have been ordered.

There seems to be a contradiction between the greater critical detachment of Sakha (Yakutia)’s newspapers and the high occurrence of ‘pre-

ordered' articles. 'Pre-ordered' articles may simply be a way of making extra money, or of maintaining reasonable relationships with the powerful figures around them, by conferring favours on behalf of their owners and their owners' friends. The higher percentage of pre-ordered articles in *Nashe Vremya* is one indication that its financial and political backing is less secure than that of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*. Pre-ordered articles may also be evidence of a greater readiness by the Republic's political elites to co-opt the press into their political endeavours.

One conclusion is that these newspapers and their owners are relatively weak but nevertheless autonomous participants within Sakha (Yakutia)'s political hierarchy. Other articles they published show that they exist alongside other secondary political actors, who are also competing for their personal interests as individual agents. For example, *Nashe Vremya* described the Members of Parliament (*deputaty*) "flinging thunder and lightning" over a plan to build rural schools at a parliamentary committee meeting (*Nashe Vremya* June 4, 2004: p. 3). Aleksandr Uarov at one point "scolded the capital's *DSK* and *KSMK* [two organisations in charge of building and reconstruction] for being 'monopolists, who quadruple prices', and promised to deal with them, just as he was going to deal with those (is this throwing a stone at the Minister of Building, Derepovskiy?) who work with greedy contractors". However, the committee eventually passed the plan they had criticised so vehemently on to the main parliament meeting as it stood, raising the possibility that they were using the meeting primarily as an opportunity to attack each other, thus establishing their positions within a competitive elite group.

Yakutsk Vecherniy is also frank in reporting conflicts at higher political

levels, between President Shtyrov and Mikhal'chuk. The newspaper claimed that the Executive had demanded a review of the legal foundations of Yakutsk's general construction plan, in order to undermine Mikhal'chuk's control over the new building on Yakutsk's territory (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 4, 2004: p. 2). Similarly, *Nashe Vremya* repeatedly alludes to the political battles between Shtyrov and Mikhal'chuk in both news articles, and the satire page Itar-Kha-Tass. For example, *Nashe Vremya*'s announcement that Mikhal'chuk had cancelled some of the celebrations of Yakutsk's anniversary, out of respect for the victims of the Beslan hostage-taking, pointed out that the opening of the Svetlinsk power station had been celebrated in Yakutsk the day after Russia's official day of mourning, with "the resounding of songs and dances" (*Nashe Vremya*, September 10, 2004: p. 6). The author wondered whether "the town hall and the executive aren't walking in step again".

The impression given by these pieces is that several conflicts are occurring simultaneously, among the various groupings and individuals operating within the Republic's elite sphere. The groupings themselves appear to overlap the Republic's political and business spheres, as these newspapers show. All the newspapers contain stories that describe either representatives of the Republic's state organs acting as private businessmen, or private businesses taking the state's functions upon themselves. For example, *Yakutia* described how the General Director of an open shareholders' organisation used his company's money to open a school in his home village (*Yakutia*, June 10, 2004: p. 2). President Shtyrov's own career also exemplifies the ease with which politicians and businessmen can change their positioning: he was the Director of Sakha (Yakutia)'s state diamond company ALROSA, until he became the

Republic's President in 2001.

Section 5.2: Sakha (Yakutia)'s political elites, and their relationship with the Russian Federation

5.2.1 Political practice in Sakha (Yakutia)

All three newspapers contain evidence that elite figures can behave as if they believed they were placed beyond the moral, social and economic conventions these newspapers themselves acknowledge as central to Sakha (Yakutia)'s social life. They report actions and statements made by politicians, businessmen and high-level government officials (*chinovniki*), which indicate a general tendency for elite figures to regard themselves as entitled to make use of whatever resources they can commandeer, without reference to the practices and relationships formally recognised by republican legislation. For example, *Yakutia* described how Gennadiy Savochkin, the head of Gazovikov settlement's municipal administration, allowed one of his employees to move into a hostel's (*obschezhitiye*) communal kitchen, thus depriving the hostel's inhabitants of their access to running water (*Yakutia* June 4, 2004: p. 8). *Nashe Vremya* published an interview with Andrey Vysokikh, a private businessman who in 2002 organised the reconstruction of a wooden tower that had been part of Yakutsk's original fortress (*Nashe Vremya* September 10, 2004: p. 3). He claimed that Mikhal'chuk had asked him to finish the reconstruction in time for the celebration of Yakutsk's anniversary, promising that he would be Vysokikh's "debtor". The new tower would therefore have been associated with

Mikhal'chuk's major public display, even though the fact that Vysokikh created a civic organisation to raise the necessary money indicates that Yakutsk's municipal administration did not primarily fund the reconstruction. It was reported afterwards that Mikhal'chuk's *chinovniki* did not feel obliged to do anything but "shrug their shoulders" at Vysokikh's request that his favour be returned (*Nashe Vremya* September 10, 2004: p. 3).

Both government and commercial newspapers constantly refer to the capacity of money in Sakha (Yakutia) to appear or disappear in unexpected places. Articles range from *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s allegation that President Shtyrov had allocated three million rubles from the state budget to buy the singer A. Adamovaya a flat, through to *Nashe Vremya*'s account of the charitable project that was to be partially funded by Yakutsk's municipality, but which was not mentioned at all in the municipal budget and was "happily forgotten" (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, 25 June, 2004: p. 8; *Nashe Vremya*, 18 June, 2004: p. 6). The absence of government money is also a constant theme: for example, *Yakutia* reported that Yakutsk municipality's health budget had a deficit of 40.4 per cent (*Yakutia*, 12 June, 2004: p. 1).

Both *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* mention *kampaneyschina*, which according to them means the republican politicians' habit of trying to force the population to 'volunteer' their labour or money for a government project, such as preparing Yakutsk for the *Deti Azii* festival. *Kampaneyschina* is often organised in the form of *subbotniki*, or specific days when particular collectives undertake mutually beneficial and supposedly voluntary work; *subbotniki* were a regular part of life during the Soviet era. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* mentions *kampaneyschina* in a variety of articles published during the run up to

the *Deti Azii* tournament. The claims behind these references were fully set out in an unsigned personal column devoted entirely to this theme, which claimed the following dialogue to be a quotation from a meeting of the "Commission for the Co-operation of the Forces of State Control":

- They're not taking part in the *subbotniki*?
- No.
- Something needs to be done. The pressure needs to be put on. What leverage do you have over them? Use everything! Close them down entirely!
- For doing what?
- For doing whatever. (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 4, 2004: p. 13.)

The article describes *kampaneyschina* as resulting from government workers' eagerness to please their bosses. In the case of the *Deti Azii* tournament, the politician personally in charge of the preparations, Vice President Aleksandr Akimov, allegedly gave a "push" (*nakachka*) to the heads of Yakutsk's various policing organisations, who in turn 'pushed' their inferiors; the 'push' ultimately unleashed swarms of police inspectors on Yakutsk's small businesses and shops, to pressure their owners into attending the *subbotniki*. This chain of events implies Sakha (Yakutia)'s state institutions to exist as strong vertical hierarchies of government officials (*chinovniki*) and politicians, who regard themselves as having the power to co-opt private citizens into their initiatives. The article quotes the Vice-Mayor of Yakutsk Nikolai Lepchikov as saying, "You need to know that the town [Yakutsk] doesn't exist for you, but you exist for the town! ... You were given the possibility of working in the town – look yourselves to see the benefit you can bring it."

Nashe Vremya occasionally made passing references to *kampaneyschina* and the power relationships it implies in its news articles, while the stories in Itar-Kha-Tass consistently incorporated it into their representation of VseYelensko-Khindigirskiy *Krai*', or Sakha (Yakutia). For example, one story describes the Mayor of Shtykutsk's (Yakutsk) attempts to make the suburbs look like rural villages: he orders 80 tons of the freshest dung to be brought in, for the "cultural department" to dress the local population in sarafans and peasant headdresses (*kokoshniki*), and for each family to be given a scythe, sickle and rake (*Nashe Vremya* June 4, 2004: p. 38). Nothing resembling *kampaneyschina* was mentioned by Buryatia's newspapers.

Yakutia reported that citizens and students came to celebrate the Day of the Surrounding Environment by organising *subbotniki* to clean up their local towns, showing that *subbotniki* do occur in connection with state-sponsored holidays, whether or not their participants are genuine volunteers (*Yakutia* June 5, 2004: p. 4). *Yakutia* also published an appeal for Sakha (Yakutia)'s citizens and businesses to provide extra funding for *Deti Azii* on June 5, seven weeks before the games were due to start, indicating that the politicians in charge unexpectedly found themselves short of money during their final preparations (*Yakutia* June 5, 2004: p. 2). The resort to a public appeal at such short notice shows that the republican government has reason to regard its population as a resource that can be called upon. Whether or not the government's confidence in its citizenry results from its use of the direct pressure described in *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya*, *Yakutia*'s appeal corroborates the commercial newspapers' claim that the government can attempt to mobilise the Republic's population for its own purposes.

As in Buryatia, legislation in Sakha (Yakutia) sets its citizens the task of defining their positions within complex and inefficient bureaucratic procedures, which give the state considerable power to set its desired status quo. For instance, *Yakutia* shows that citizens have to produce at least nine different official proofs of their status if they wish to assert their right to a lower payment for public services; this number can increase dramatically for certain individuals, such as divorced women (*Yakutia* June 10, 2004: p. 3). Bureaucratic hurdles can be allowed to remain, even if they reduce economic growth. As *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya* described, Sakha (Yakutia) had still not created a way to implement its population's constitutional right to own land in Yakutsk, over ten years after the Russian Constitution was signed (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 4, 2004: p. 13; *Nashe Vremya*, August 27, 2004: p. 10–11). Citizens were thus continuously forced to negotiate leasing agreements with Yakutsk's Municipal Administration. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* contended that this hinders the development of small businesses in particular, since entrepreneurs have to go through long and difficult procedures in order to lease the land their premises occupy. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* also alleged that these arrangements were engineered in order to maintain Yakutsk municipality's control over the town (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 4, 2004: p. 13).

This example tends to confirm that an essential point made during Chapter Three's discussion of legal processes in Buryatia also applies to Sakha (Yakutia): the creation of a legislation that governs the Republic efficiently, while safeguarding its citizens' interests, is not necessarily the government's primary concern. Law can instead be used to maintain a particular actor's economic position, or in some cases can be incorporated into the conflicts that

occur between elite groups. For example, one of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s satirical pieces reported how the Minister Kliment Ivanov tried to remove the Speaker Vasiliy Filippov by starting an impeachment process, adding the comment that this was perhaps in order to attain the position of Speaker for himself (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 25, 2004: p. 6). Ivanov did in fact lead an attempt to impeach Filippov in 2002, as both *Yakutia* and the republican news agency Sakha News describe (*Yakutia*, January 30, 2002).[29]

Sakha (Yakutia)'s legal processes are subject to inexplicable hiatuses. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* had apparently caused the Procurator to rule that the Mayor of Yakutsk Mikhal'chuk had raised the public service tariffs illegally, but as the newspaper itself had to admit, there was some uncertainty as to whether Mikhal'chuk would actually change the tariffs (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 25, 2004: p. 5). Mikhal'chuk's unwillingness to respond implies that he must have had some grounds to hope that he would find some way of avoiding reducing the tariffs, despite the Procurator's ruling. His confidence is likely to have been bolstered by the precedent set by the Speaker of Sakha (Yakutia)'s Parliament, Nikolai Solomov. Solomov occupied his position until 2005, despite having been accused by the Republic's Procurator in March 2004 of beating his wife to death on October 26, 2003 (*Izvestiya* March 5, 2004: p. 5; *Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 25, 2004: p. 6). A high status, and the corresponding social and economic resources it commands, seem to be able to override the dictates of Sakha (Yakutia)'s legal institutions.

The contrast between the discourses in Buryatia's commercial and government-sponsored newspapers was discussed in Chapter Three, as were the

[29] www.1sn.ru/print/php?id=518: "*Krapleniya karta yakutskogo parlamenta*"; August 10, 2007.

close relationships between commercial newspapers and their audiences. The commercial newspapers in Sakha (Yakutia), like those in Buryatia, have to represent the Republic's context in a way that resonates with their audiences' perceptions to a reasonable degree, in order for them to create the relationships and interactions that sell.

Yakutsk Vecherniy's high proportion of articles marked 'Human Interest' reflects the way it presents a convivial relationship with the distinct personality of its journalists as its main attraction. The fundamental characteristic of this personality is a 'cool' (*krutoy*) and savvy pragmatism, which is supposedly the secret of the journalist's success in providing the 'honest' information their readers need to orientate themselves within a challenging social environment. An example is *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s Wild Field (*Dikoye Polye*) page, which epitomises the personal relationship that apparently exists between its readers and journalists. *Dikoye Polye* offers small businessmen essential information about the legal and political systems within which they work, through a combination of news articles and personal columns. Its colloquial style gives the impression that its journalists and their readers are united in the struggle for financial gain, within an unstable context dominated by powerful and unscrupulous individuals bent on maintaining their superior wealth. As one personal column put it, "We travel further down our tangled and uneven way – through the thorns of the wild field [*dikoye polye*] to starry business success!" (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 25, 2004: p. 15). The journalists demonstrate their 'cool' understanding of Sakha (Yakutia)'s business environment through their emphatically unsentimental and cynical outlook, which is implied to be essential for survival. One of *Dikoye Polye*'s weekly aphorisms, published under the

rubric 'cool ideas' (*krutyye mysli*), sums up their contention: "Nothing hinders creeping so much as wings" (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 4, 2004: p. 13). The articles surrounding this aphorism tell their readers what to do if they are harassed by the police, or recount Yakutsk Municipality's efforts to maintain their control over land ownership in Yakutsk. The chatty, informative style is noteworthy:

> And as well as that, the length of time plots of land can be leased out is artificially lowered to one year. It is very unprofitable for the town hall of Yakutsk to allot land for longer periods – a notorious bit of land might be needed for the next building of the century, or it might catch the eye of someone close to the Mayor's circles. (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 4, 2004: p. 13.)

These articles describe a status quo whereby Yakutsk's small businessmen have to negotiate their way through complex and changing legislation, ‘creeping’ forward by means of their wits, determination, and the knowledge provided by *Dikoye Polye*. The threat presented by the powerful makes any aspirations about using ‘wings’ naïve. Meanwhile, the journalists' insouciant language emphasises their intuitive understanding of Sakha (Yakutia)'s political elites, which allows them to be careless about the finer points of editorial convention.

The journalists also write with the assumption that they understand their readership well enough to be able to speak on their behalf without alienating them. For example, one columnist mentions that if any government official (*chinovnik*) were to ask Yakutsk's small businessmen what they thought about the *Deti Azii* tournament, they would "learn many new and interesting words" (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 4, 2004: p. 13). They are likely to be correct in this assumption, since their articles attract a sufficient readership to make *Yakutsk*

Vecherniy one of the most popular newspapers in Yakutsk, according to the journalists interviewed and *Yakutia*'s audience research. *Dikoye Polye*'s allegations must therefore correlate with some citizens' experiences of Yakutsk life.

The journalists' display of intimacy with their readership projects an imagined reader who shares the journalists' 'cool' outlook. Readers are thereby invited to imagine themselves as *krutyye*, savvy, and as having the potential to overcome the various problems that beset them. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* also contains representations of weak individuals, whose personal characteristics contrast with those of the journalists, and by implication also of the readers. For example, a story about a woman who lost her flat through a confidence trick carried the headline, "You'll pay for naïveté!"; the first paragraph ends with the sentence, "In wild times naïveté is a vice, and a vice that's punished" (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 18, 2004: p. 9). *Yakutsk Vecherniy* thus implies that its journalists' and readers' *krutoy* pragmatism sets them apart from the foolish and corrupt people around them, as a privileged group within the Republic.

Yakutsk Vecherniy persists in its commitment to this relationship between its journalists and readers, despite the fact that, as the newspaper itself admits, the skilful exploitation of the law is not necessarily going to attain the desired results – as might be expected in a context where elites have the capacity to influence legal processes. For example, a feature on how employees can force their employers to pay them the correct salary mentions a group of medical workers who attempted the legal action the article describes, but who "now assiduously avoid conversations on this theme" (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 4, 2004: p. 7). *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s journalists understand this repetitive narrative

about a plucky underdog to have an attraction for their readers that enables them to publish their numerous mistakes and inconsistencies, in addition to *zakaz* articles.

As with *Yakutsk Vecherniy*, the personality of *Nashe Vremya*'s journalists appears to exert a direct influence on its content. *Nashe Vremya*'s journalists come across as independent-minded observers who are motivated to share their personal opinions and knowledge with the reader. The negative comments *Nashe Vremya* makes about Sakha (Yakutia)'s political context are criticisms of specific phenomena, rather than repetitive statements that maintained a negative representation of the status quo, as in *Yakutsk Vecherniy*. Instead, the tone of *Nashe Vremya*'s articles is more optimistic. For example, one journalist asked her interviewee to "wish the citizens of Sakha (Yakutia) something in advance of the anniversary of Yakutsk", so that they did not "finish their conversation on a pessimistic note" (*Nashe Vremya* September 10, 2004: p. 3). Criticism can be sharp, however. For example, *Nashe Vremya* could present state celebrations as outpourings of money and promises, which often fail to benefit the supposed recipients. The series of photographs and captions in Figure 5.3 on the page opposite was published ten days before the beginning of the *Deti Azii* sports tournament. The introductory text strikes an ironic note:

> Yakutsk continues to live off the expectation of a grandiose sporting holiday, the most dazzling event of the last four years. But while the main streets are rapidly taking on a quasi-divine appearance, and huge placards and bunting with the symbols of the forthcoming Games are starting to appear on luxurious central buildings, somewhere in the wilds of the outlying slums, far from government eyes, other, genuine and the most ordinary children of Asia are every day rushing around the gateways, and playing their own, probably, no less

> cheerful and interesting games. Practically none of them even knows that in a month and a half's time hundreds of little boys and girls are arriving from various far-away countries. And they also don't know why and for what the grown-ups thought up at some point a Day for the Defence of Children, and why they – the grown-ups – mark it on the first day of June. But essentially it doesn't have the slightest importance for them, because the long-awaited summer without any special holidays always was and will be the most happy time for our remarkable native kiddies. (*Nashe Vremya* June 4, 2004: p. 7.)

The journalist who produced this page did not sign it, in contrast to almost all the other newspaper material in this analysis.

The collection of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers in this sample shows the extent to which prominent actors are capable of asserting their wills at the expense of the less powerful. This creates a situation where individuals have to amass social, economic and political capital, since they cannot rely on protection from the state, or its legislation. Sakha (Yakutia)'s elites therefore have a proprietorial attitude towards its political and economic resources, and their personal access to them – which is likely to be part of the reason why a state that produces a quarter of the world's diamonds, and which in 2004 owned 32 per cent of the company that extracts these diamonds, had a debt of 11.8 billion rubles (over 465 million US dollars) in 2004 (*Nashe Vremya*, June 11, 2004: p. 3).

5.2.2 Sakha (Yakutia)'s administration and the federal government

Yakutsk Vecherniy and *Nashe Vremya* consistently presented the federal government as ultimately having the greater power over the Republic and its resources. For example, an article in *Nashe Vremya*'s June sample, with the sub-

heading "Status Quo", described how a federal-level legislator's recommendation that Yakutsk maintain its status as an urban region (*gorodskoy okrug*) was likely to override the Executive's attempts to turn Yakutsk into an ordinary municipality (*munitsipal'niy raion*) (*Nashe Vremya* June 4, 2004: p. 3). *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s report on the impact recent federal-level legislation was due to have on Sakha (Yakutia)'s regional administrations had the headline, “Putin sent a message, Yakutia set off” (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 11, 2004: p. 2).

Although *Yakutia* contained articles that are likely to be direct communications from a federal political source, it was prepared to take an independent line from the federal government. On the one hand, it published the Federal Minister Mikhail Zubarov's defence of the monetisation of social welfare payments, as did several government and private newspapers in Irkutsk *Oblast'* and Buryatia (*Yakutia* June 5, 2004: p. 3). However, it did not carry a presidential statement supporting the federal government's removal of regional elections, unlike *Buryatia* (*Buryatia*, September 16, 2004: p. 1). *Yakutia*'s relative independence from federal input indicates the Republican government's desire to act as a self-sufficient political entity, at least in the public arena.

As all the newspapers show, the argument between the federal and republican governments over the federal legislation known in Sakha (Yakutia) as the 'super-law' (*superzakon*) was a decisive moment, demonstrating the republican government’s desire to take its own initiatives in the face of the federal government's increasing domination. One of these initiatives was what became known as the "Governors' mutiny" (*bunt gubernatorov*), over the *superzakon* (*Yakutia* September 1, 2004: p. 2).

All the newspapers contended that the *superzakon* would have greatly

increased the republican government's financial responsibilities towards its citizens, while simultaneously reducing the money at its disposal. The law required the reorganisation of all the sub-regional units of governance in the Russian Federation into 'self-governing' municipalities, which would have complete control over the allocation of social welfare payments. As part of this restructuring, the financing of social welfare payments would come from the individual regions' budgets, rather than that of the federal government. In addition, the *superzakon* removed the federal government's obligation to finance the extra subsidies for those living in the northern regions, such as Sakha (Yakutia), together with the regions' constitutional right to share the management of the natural resources on their territories. It thus had the power significantly to undermine Sakha (Yakutia)'s pretensions towards autonomy, by removing its financial viability. The Republic was already in debt, as Section One described. The disappearance of the considerable income generated by Sakha (Yakutia)'s extensive natural resources, in addition to the financial burdens the *superzakon* imposed, could cause it to become entirely dependent on federal subsidies, like Buryatia.

The controversy moved up a gear in July 2004 when a group of regional leaders, including the Presidents of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), signed a request for Putin to reassess the law. Most of the signatories withdrew their support, among them the President of Buryatia, after "preventives" (*profilaktiki*) had been administered by Putin's regional representatives; President Shtyrov was one of the only regional leaders to continue the initiative (*Yakutia*, September 1, 2004: p. 2). *Yakutia* became one of the arenas in which this conflict took place, in that it published both the views against the *superzakon*

and articles supporting the federal position. Putin signed the *superzakon* into effect on August 22, 2004, without having made the changes the regions demanded. The passing of the *superzakon* was followed by Putin's announcement on September 13, 2004, that the leaders of the Federation's regions would be approved by the Russian Federation's President, rather than being elected by their populations. These legislative changes have further institutionalised the federal government's supremacy over regional governments, apparently creating a vertical power hierarchy similar to that of the Soviet Union. The federal government has since continued to undermine Sakha (Yakutia)'s economic position, by acquiring a controlling stake in ALROSA; originally, as Chapter One describes, the federal and regional governments were both given 32 per cent of ALROSA's shares, when it was set up in 1992.

However, the sample under review revealed that tensions with the federal government could be resolved in other ways. In particular, the newspapers revealed details about the career trajectories of certain politicians, showing that the federal and republican governments do not necessarily exist as two political camps in competition with one another. The variable use of law in Sakha (Yakutia) seems to reflect a disaggregation between the legally recognised institutional hierarchies, and the truly influential power relationships within the Federation as a whole.

Yakutsk Vecherniy contended in one feature that the federal government had effectively replaced Sakha (Yakutia)'s first President, Mikhail Nikolayev, with Shtyrov (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, September 17, 2004: p. 3). Its evidence consisted of what it claimed were several striking coincidences in the run up to the election, held in 2001. For example, it stated that Nikolayev had withdrawn

his candidature in favour of Shtyrov, immediately after both Shtyrov and Nikolayev had attended meetings at the Kremlin on the same day (*Yakutsk Vecherniy,* September 17, 2004: p. 3). Sakha (Yakutia)'s court ruled against Nikolayev's eligibility for a third presidential term the day after his withdrawal, despite its previous incapacity to come to a decision: it had examined this problem three times without result (*Yakutsk Vecherniy,* September 17, 2004: p. 3). The impression the newspapers give of Sakha (Yakutia)'s court makes it easy to imagine it coming to an arrangement with a powerful federal actor, after a period of negotiation between Nikolayev and his opponents. Nevertheless, *Yakutia* contained several articles by Nikolayev, showing that he continues to occupy an elite position in the Russian Federation, despite his promotion of an agenda that contradicts the federal government's emphasis on centralisation. He is still the Vice-Chairman of the Federation Council (his position was confirmed for another term on April 25, 2008) and therefore has a level of direct access to high-level federal politicians.[30] This suggests that Nikolayev was able to demand a degree of protection from the Kremlin in return for stepping down from the election. Putin recommended Shtyrov for a second presidential term in 2007, despite his leading role in the *bunt gubernatorov* described above, indicating that Shtyrov himself can also operate with a degree of independence without destroying his relationship with the Kremlin.

Shtyrov and Nikolayev must have the type of relationship with the federal government that enables them to negotiate directly with the Kremlin. Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers contained other evidence that leading politicians have the capacity to make exclusive bargains with federal actors, which enables

[30] http://ru.wikipedia.org: "*Nikolayev, Mikhail Yefimovich*"; November 23, 2009.

them to extract help from the federal government in pursuing a non-federal agenda. *Yakutia* published an article by Aleksandr Migalkin, the Minister of External Relations, in which he celebrated the success of the *Deti Azii* tournament (*Yakutia* September 2, 2004: p. 3). He mentioned in particular the "huge work" the federal Ministry of External Relations had done in arranging visa invitations for the tournament's foreign participants. The federal Ministry of External Relations had thus contributed to an event that was designed to raise the international awareness of Sakha (Yakutia) as a distinct entity, rather than a region within the Russian Federation. Migalkin's praise of the federal Ministry of External Relations in general could have been a gesture towards repaying the favour the Ministry had done him, raising the possibility that there had been a specific negotiation between them about this event. Meanwhile Mikhal'chuk resigned from his post in September 2007, possibly in connection with the 20 formal charges of corruption the municipal administration staff then faced; this did not prevent Putin from nominating him as Governor of Arkhangel'sk Region (*Oblast'*) on March 9, 2008.[31]

All this evidence suggests that what *Nashe Vremya* calls the "flattering, lobbying discussions" in "large office ante-rooms" are as important in determining the chain of events in Sakha (Yakutia) as the activities occurring within the parameters of institutionalised practice – and therefore that the power hierarchy between the federal and republican governments in fact consists of the developing personal relationships between federal and republican politicians (*Nashe Vremya* June 4, 2004: p. 4). The publicly acknowledged configuration of federal and republican institutions is thus complemented by a changing network

[31] www.rferl.com: bulletin for March 15, 2008.

of personal connections, which mediate power relationships that do not correspond exactly to the obvious dominance of the federal government over the republican.

Positing the existence of elite groupings that overlap the boundary between the federal and republican governments explains why a remote and sparsely populated territory can produce such varied and competitive elite actors, whose activities are reflected in the controversies aired in *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Nashe Vremya*. It also explains the difference in newspaper discourse between Sakha (Yakutia) and Buryatia. A lack of direct interest in Buryatia on the part of federal politicians would enable a small group of local politicians to consolidate their power, in the process creating a relatively homogeneous and obedient mass media. Sakha (Yakutia)'s most obvious attraction for federal actors is the wealth it contains, in the form of its natural resources. Buryatia in contrast has very little to offer, hence the lack of evidence in Buryatia's newspapers of direct federal engagement.

Conclusion:

The tense relationship between a dominant federal government and a subservient but discontented republican government co-exists with the dynamics between a group of federal and republican actors, who are all making money out of Sakha (Yakutia) in various ways. Certain federal actors must also be benefiting from Sakha (Yakutia)'s present status quo, since they have made such efforts to increase their control over it. The members of this group – whether based in Yakutsk, or elsewhere – have an interest in maintaining the network of

relationships that form it (even though many of them are in direct competition) because they are also maintaining the possibility of negotiating with individuals they know personally. It is much easier for the new federal controllers of ALROSA to make a deal with Shtyrov that allows him to continue as President, rather than to replace him with someone who has to form new relationships with the republic's elites. Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources have helped to produce a state that apparently has more autonomy than Buryatia, but which is held in place by the negotiations that enable the federal and republican actors concerned to continue making a profit. However, the republican governments present their citizens with similar challenges, both lacking the capacity to govern effectively.

The relationship between Sakha (Yakutia)'s administration and the federal government has implications for the political status quo in the Russian Federation as a whole. It suggests that the Federation's political establishment exists as a complex network of overlapping elite groups, rather than a 'power vertical' of governing institutions headed by the presidential administration. Members of the central government therefore sometimes have to compromise their interests with those of regional actors.

The other reason why it is in the federal government's interest to retain the current administration of Sakha (Yakutia) is connected to the strength of Sakha ethnic identity, among not only the general Sakha population, but also within parts of Sakha (Yakutia)'s political establishment. As Chapter Six will describe, Sakha culture and identity have a major influence on both the Republic's political culture, and the society it governs.

Chapter Six

The interaction between Sakha ethnic culture and political legitimisation in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

Introduction:

This chapter builds on Chapter Five's discussion of Sakha (Yakutia)'s political context, to show how the contemporary development of Sakha culture and identity interacts with the Republic's political processes. Chapter Five described Sakha (Yakutia)'s political hierarchy, and the complex relationship between the federal and republican governments. Chapter Six investigates the extent to which Sakha culture continues to produce specific values and practices, along with their power to influence mainstream public discourse. It examines the hypothesis that those in charge of Sakha (Yakutia) have to manage a strong desire for the Republic to function as a specifically Sakha autonomous state, among both the mass population and the Republic's politicians and government workers. This factor could motivate the federal government to maintain the current configuration of high-level republican politicians, despite the difficulties they can cause, since they have the capacity to restrain the Sakha desire for autonomy without risking a political crisis.

The first section of this chapter discusses the results of the quantitative analysis, comparing them with an equivalent analysis of Buryatia's local

newspapers. It shows that Sakha culture has a much more significant power to influence the Republic's mainstream public sphere than does Buryat culture. The second, third and fourth sections of this chapter build on and explain the findings presented in the first section. They show the more detailed impression of Sakha culture and identity that can be obtained by the qualitative analysis of these newspapers' discourse. The second and third sections set out what the newspapers reveal about the changing perceptions behind contemporary Sakha community hierarchies, describing the concern over the world status of the Sakha people they stimulate. Section Four discusses the role political legitimisation narratives have in this process of cultural development.

Section 6.1: The influence of Sakha culture on Sakha (Yakutia)'s mainstream discursive spheres

The quantitative stage of the content analysis indicates the existence of a strong Sakha influence over Sakha (Yakutia)'s culture and politics, in tandem with a relatively high level of Sakha cultural particularity.

The code 'Sakha Cultural Practice' was used to mark articles referring to a specifically Sakha practice or idea, such as the *Ysyakh* summer solstice ritual. 'Buryat Cultural Practice' and 'Russian Cultural Practice' were similarly attached to activities or ideas that are acknowledged in the regions concerned to be 'Buryat' or 'Russian' in particular. The codes indicating Buryat and Sakha cultural practice were only needed for the analysis of newspapers published in these peoples' respective titular Republics, since there were so few references to Buryat culture in Sakha (Yakutia), and vice versa.

The first reading of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers revealed a similar variation in the ways the government-sponsored and commercial newspapers referred to ethnic culture as that of Buryatia's newspapers, necessitating the use of the prefix 'Super' explained in Chapter Four. 'Ethnicity' marked *Buryatia*'s and *Yakutia*'s mentions of ethnic culture in the abstract, while the code 'Super Ethnicity' indicated the privately owned commercial newspapers' references to ethnic culture. The presence of 'Super' in the code name arises from the commercial newspapers' indirect references to ethnic culture, which required a degree of interpretation.

Table 6.1 shows the percentage of articles in each newspaper sample coded with 'Ethnicity', 'Super Ethnicity', 'Buryat Cultural Practice', 'Sakha Cultural Practice' and 'Russian Cultural Practice'.

Newspaper	Ethnicity	Super Ethnicity	Buryat Cultural Practice	Sakha Cultural Practice	Russian Cultural Practice
Buryatia (June only, *N* = 371)	9.7 (36)	*n/a*	8.4 (31)	*n/a*	3.5 (13)
Yakutia (June only, *N* = 491)	5.3 (26)	*n/a*	*n/a*	9.2 (45)	2.6 (13)
Inform Polis (*N* = 298)	*n/a*	5.4 (16)	6.0 (18)	*n/a*	3.7 (11)
Nashe Vremya (*N* = 187)	*n/a*	4.8 (9)	*n/a*	8.6 (16)	3.2 (6)
Pyatnitsa Plyus (*N* = 75)	*n/a*	3.0 (2)	0 (0)	*n/a*	5.3 (4)
Yakutsk Vecherniy (*N* = 302)	*n/a*	5.2 (16)	*n/a*	7.9 (24)	4.0 (12)

Table 6.1: Percentages of articles in newspapers marked with codes related to ethnic culture (the figures in brackets are the number of articles to which the codes were attached; *N* = the number of articles in the sample; *n/a* = not applicable)

As Table 6.1 shows, the newspapers from Sakha (Yakutia) made more references to Sakha cultural practice than their equivalents in Buryatia made to Buryat cultural practice. 9.2 per cent of *Yakutia*'s articles referred to Sakha cultural practice, compared with the 8.4 per cent of *Buryatia*'s referring to Buryat cultural practice; 8.6 per cent of *Nashe Vremya*'s, as against 6.0 of *Inform Polis*', and 7.9 per cent of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s, against a complete absence of references to Buryat culture in *Pyatnitsa Plyus*. *Pyatnitsa Plyus* is also distinctive in that it contains the most references to Russian culture out of

all the newspapers. 5.3 per cent of its articles were marked with 'Russian cultural practice', compared to 4.0 per cent of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s, 3.7 per cent of *Inform Polis*', 3.2 per cent of *Nashe Vremya*'s, 3.5 per cent of *Buryatia*'s, and 2.6 per cent of *Yakutia*'s. As the previous figures show, Buryatia's newspapers mentioned Russian culture more often than Sakha (Yakutia)'s. *Pyatnitsa Plyus*' relatively frequent mentions of Russian culture, along with its lack of reference to Buryat culture, show that it is a 'Russian' newspaper – i.e., produced by Russian journalists for a Russian audience. *Inform Polis,* meanwhile, is a 'Buryat' newspaper (as noted in Chapter Four). By contrast, all of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers made more references to Sakha culture than Russian. 9.2 per cent of *Yakutia*'s articles referred to Sakha culture, while 2.6 per cent referred to Russian; the equivalent figures for *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* are 8.6 and 3.2 per cent, and 7.9 and 4.0 per cent respectively. This suggests that none of Sakha (Yakutia)'s most popular newspapers is exclusively directed towards Russians. They instead show a bias towards Sakha culture, despite being published in Russian rather than Sakha.

The greater proportion of *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s audiences are likely to live in Yakutsk, since the costs of distributing newspapers over Sakha (Yakutia)'s enormous and poorly connected territories are prohibitively high for privately owned commercial newspapers. The proportion of Sakha in Yakutsk has increased dramatically since the late 1990s, as large numbers of rural Sakha have taken up the increased opportunities provided by Sakha (Yakutia)'s first president, Mikhail Nikolayev, to gain a higher education in Yakutsk. In addition Sakha (Yakutia)'s agricultural regions, which are largely populated by Sakha, continue to suffer from an economic

depression, encouraging their inhabitants to migrate to Yakutsk (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 33).[32] *Nashe Vremya*'s and *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s biases towards Sakha culture are likely to be responses to the presence of large Sakha populations in Yakutsk, who have a distinct sense of Sakha identity. They indicate a perception among these newspapers' journalists that sufficient proportions of their target audiences have a strong enough regard for their Sakha identity to make ignoring it a commercial risk, despite their willingness to buy Russian- rather than Sakha-language newspapers.

The large discrepancies between the proportions of articles coded as 'Sakha Cultural Practice' and 'Russian Cultural Practice' poses the question as to why Sakha (Yakutia)'s journalists do not feel a need to ensure that 'Sakha' and 'Russian' cultural practices receive roughly equal levels of exposure. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* in particular showed a tendency to publish features specifically directed towards a Sakha audience, without also producing articles aimed at Russians. The two samples of *Yakutsk Vecherniy* contained nine feature articles entirely devoted to various aspects of Sakha life and culture, such as an interview with a traditional Sakha dancer (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 25, 2004: p. 55). And while it did publish three articles on Russian culture, these were very likely to have had relevance for Sakha readers. For example, its article on two Russian Orthodox chapels in Yakutsk was part of a series it published on Yakutsk's history, and would have interested anyone with a curiosity about Yakutsk, whether Sakha or Russian (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* September 3, 2004: p. 55). *Nashe Vremya*'s news section contained only two

[32] As Chapter One describes, Sakha (Yakutia)'s Sakha populations are concentrated in the agricultural regions, while the Slavic populations live in the industrial centres. This is due to a massive immigration of Slavic industrial workers during the Soviet period. The large Sakha population in Yakutsk increases the chances of rural Sakha having family or regional networks there, which provide a motivation to settle in Yakutsk rather than the industrial towns.

features that explicitly concerned ethnic culture, although the two samples together produced 16 references to Sakha cultural practice. These two features also demonstrated a greater emphasis on Sakha culture: both would have been likely to interest Sakha readers, while only one would have attracted Russians, unless they had a particular interest in Sakha history (*Nashe Vremya* June 25, 2004: pp. 12–13; August 27, 2004: pp. 1–2). In contrast, *Inform Polis* balanced its eight features on Buryat culture with four features on Russian culture, despite being a 'Buryat' newspaper.

Yakutia was the only newspaper that appeared to be making a deliberate effort to publish material on all of Sakha (Yakutia)'s prominent ethnic cultures – i.e., Sakha, Russian, and the Tungus (Eveny and Evenky) reindeer-herding peoples. This effort is likely to be one aspect of the Republican government's self-promotion, intended to show that the Republican government has an equal concern for all of Sakha (Yakutia)'s ethnic groups, as would befit the government of a multi-ethnic (*mnogonatsional'niy*) state. But while *Yakutia* published four articles on Russian or Slavic culture, and six on reindeer-herding communities over the month of June, it devoted 17 articles to Sakha culture, although this large number is likely to have been due to the celebration of the *Ysyakh* towards the end of June. *Yakutia* did not however surround its coverage of the *Ysyakh* with the celebration of other, non-Sakha festivals, in contrast to *Buryatia*'s treatment of the Buryat summer sports festival, the *Surkharban*. *Buryatia* contained a single feature on this event, while the preceding edition published articles on Ulan Ude's anniversary, and a preliminary report on a Slavic and Buryat folk-dancing festival; this was described in full three editions

later (*Buryatia*, June 17, 2004: p. 1; June 16, 2004: p. 1; June 16, 2004: p. 1; June 19, 2004: p. 8).

Yakutia's even-handed attitude towards the Republic's ethnic groups therefore did not extend to adjusting its celebration of a major Sakha event, which it might have done in order to prevent the Republic's other ethnic groups from perceiving their government to be thoroughly absorbed in a Sakha public occasion. This tallies with the commercial newspapers' lack of concern over their Russian audiences' potential sensitivities, since both show a willingness to permit Sakha culture to dominate over Russian. Sakha (Yakutia)'s mainstream public spheres are therefore more influenced by exclusively Sakha practices, concerns and attitudes than those in Buryatia, which implies that Sakha actors have a greater capacity to control their Republic's context than Buryat.

Table 6.1 also shows that Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers contained fewer mentions of ethnic culture per se than their equivalents from Buryatia, with the exception of the 'low quality' commercial newspapers. 'Ethnicity' was used to mark 5.3 per cent of *Yakutia*'s sample and 9.7 per cent of *Buryatia*'s; 'Super Ethnicity' was attached to 4.8 per cent of *Nashe Vremya*'s articles and 5.4 per cent of *Inform Polis*', and to 5.2 per cent of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s and 3.0 per cent of *Pyatnitsa Plyus*'. The lower proportions of articles coded as 'Ethnicity', or 'Super Ethnicity', were matched with fewer simultaneous references to ethnicity and non-Russian cultures. 45.2 per cent of *Buryatia*'s articles on Buryat cultural practice were marked as 'Ethnicity', while 26.7 per cent of *Yakutia*'s articles on Sakha cultural practice also carried this code; the equivalent figures for *Inform Polis* and *Nashe Vremya* are 38.9 and 25.0 per cent respectively, while 20.8 per cent of *Yakutsk Vecherny*'s articles on Sakha culture

also mentioned ethnicity. These figures reflect a greater tendency for the newspapers in Sakha (Yakutia) to present specifically Sakha behaviours and attitudes without also implying them to be part of the phenomenon known in Russia as 'ethnic culture'. The codes 'Ethnicity' and 'Super Ethnicity' were attached to articles that presented the behaviour they concerned as the manifestation of a particular ethnic culture, whether it be Russian, Sakha or Buryat.

A closer look at the writing to which these codes were attached reveals the differing representations of Buryat and Sakha culture that result. Textbox 6.1 contains examples of *Inform Polis*' and *Nashe Vremya*'s presentations of their respective Republics' non-Russian cultural behaviours. The quotation from *Inform Polis* consists of the headline, sub-headline and introductory paragraph from a page-long feature describing a sports tournament held at Buryatia's largest Buddhist monastery, Ivolginskiy *Datsan*. The quotation from *Nashe Vremya* is the businessman Vasiliy Filippov's response to *Nashe Vremya*'s weekly readers' poll, which in this edition asked its participants where they were going for their summer holidays.

Inform Polis	*Nashe Vremya*
Headline; sub-headline: Sportsmen fought for a VAZ-2106 [a type of car]; "The Empress Catherine's" games raised a stir and returned the era of the first Khambo Lamas	**Headline:** And where are you going?
On September 18 at Ivolginskiy *Datsan* a ceremonial occasion took place, dedicated to the 240th anniversary of Empress Catherine the Great's decree, establishing the institution of the Khambo-Lamas of East Siberia and *Zabaykal'ya*. Public prayers were said from the early morning, and the culmination of the holiday was a tournament of archery, horse-racing and national wrestling (*Inform Polis* September 22, 2004: p. 11)	**Vasiliy Filippov, Director of the Tuymaada-Agrosnab company:** Of course, I'm going to make hay in my small motherland, in Churapcha. [An agricultural sub-region in Sakha (Yakutia); *Nashe Vremya*'s underline] I go there to make hay every year. What do you mean, why? I have cows, poultry and a horse-herd. I'll be there for about a month. Is that a long time? Of course not, a month is hardly enough. Time off for me is only the haymaking in Churapcha. (*Nashe Vremya*, June 4, 2004: p. 3.)

Textbox 6.1: A comparison of *Inform Polis* and *Nashe Vremya*

Inform Polis' quotation is part of an article entirely devoted to describing a Buryat cultural event. As Chapter Four described, Buddhism is associated in Buryatia with Buryat culture, while the games listed are all part of a specific Buryat-Mongol sporting tradition. The author uses colourful, emotive language, and incorporates descriptive techniques often used in creative writing. For

example, one sub-section begins:

> Brightly coloured archers' robes, old-fashioned horn bows in their hands and singing wooden arrows against the background of the temples' roofs. Everything reminded one of the epoch of the first Khambo-Lamas. 78 *mergenov* [a Buryat-Mongol word for archer] and *mergensch* [archeress], aged from 13 to 78, took their positions. (*Inform Polis* September 22, 2004: p. 11.)

The author thereby combines imaginative representation with a straightforward description of the occasion, blurring the boundary between reality and literary creation. As all the previous quotations show, the author also emphasises the continuity between pre-revolutionary Buryat Buddhist practice, and the event described. This exhibition of contemporary Buryat culture is thus presented within a set of imagined parameters, enabling the reader to regard it as the expression of an idealised notion of Buryat culture, which transcends the chain of events initiated by the Bolshevik revolution. The adjective 'ethnic' is generally applied in the Russian Federation to cultures and identities distinct from the state cultures and identities generated during the Soviet era – therefore the explicit connection between pre-revolutionary Buryat life and contemporary Buryat culture contained within this notion identifies it as concerning 'ethnic' culture in particular. *Inform Polis* published similar articles: they all reflect the abstracted, idealised conception of ethnic culture promoted by *Buryatia*, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Conversely, the absence of articles on Buryat culture in *Pyatnitsa Plyus* can explain the low number of articles marked 'Super Ethnicity' it contained.

In contrast, *Nashe Vremya*'s mention of a typical contemporary Sakha

practice appeared without any effort to position it within an imaginary perspective, as part of an article on an entirely different topic – i.e., how hard it is for Sakha (Yakutia)'s citizens to take time off over the summer. Filippov's plan to spend his summer making hay in his "small motherland" exemplifies a widespread practice among the Sakha who have moved to Yakutsk from the sub-regions. There is a strong imperative for urban Sakha to help their country relatives, since those who continue to herd livestock have a very short summer in which to prepare enough feed for the rest of the year, in addition to growing and harvesting wheat, fruit and vegetables for themselves. Filippov is referring to a traditional Sakha method of cattle and horse herding, as his reference to his "horse herd" (*tabun*) shows. His herd will consist of the specific breed of semi-wild horse the Sakha brought to the Republic's territory, since no other type of horse in Sakha (Yakutia) can live out in the open in herds. *Nashe Vremya*'s lack of explanation or contextualisation implies that it does not expect this statement, which all its readers are likely to recognise as typically Sakha, to create problems – whether caused by a lack of comprehension, or a sense of unease when confronted with traditional Sakha practice. *Nashe Vremya*, in particular, contained several references to Sakha cultural practices in articles that were not primarily concerned with Sakha ethnic culture: the other newspapers also made such references to a lesser extent. For example, *Yakutsk Vecherniy* mentioned the *Ysyakh*, commenting adversely on drunkenness among its participants, in the course of its regular crime section (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 25, 2004: p. 12).

These statements and articles present Sakha culture as consisting of a set of practices and ideas specific to the Sakha people and their contemporary way of life, without idealising it in any way. They co-existed in all three newspapers

with more romanticised representations of Sakha culture, as the appearance of articles marked with both 'Sakha Cultural Practice' and 'Ethnicity' or 'Super Ethnicity' in these newspapers shows: *Yakutia* contained 12 articles coded as both 'Sakha Cultural Practice' and 'Ethnicity', while *Nashe Vremya* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* contained four and five articles coded as 'Sakha Cultural Practice' and 'Super Ethnicity' respectively. However, the tendency for Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers to incorporate direct manifestations of Sakha culture into their articles, without explaining them, indicates that their journalists assume their readers to regard certain Sakha cultural practices as familiar elements of the Republic's social life. Both Russians and Sakha therefore are likely to be living with the sense that Sakha cultural practice can have a direct effect on the daily running of Sakha (Yakutia) as a whole, rather than being relevant only to the Sakha themselves. The Sakha also have a greater capacity to base their notions of Sakha identity on recognisable differences in everyday behaviour than do the Buryat.

Section 6.2: Sakha cultural characteristics, and their relevance for Sakha (Yakutia)'s politicians

Section 6.2.1: The relationship between Sakha communities and their elites

A detailed analysis of the newspapers revealed a tendency for the Republic's communities to exist as strong authoritarian hierarchies. Chapter Five introduced the phenomenon referred to in Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers as *kampaneyschina* – i.e., the use of a high status to pressure subordinates into

donating their time, money and effort towards carrying out their superior's projects. The newspaper discourse presented in Chapter Five showed that higher-level politicians and government workers regularly draw on the resources *kampaneyschina* provides, as part of a general tendency for elite figures to exert their wills as if they were not aware of any legal or conventional boundaries other than the hindrances posed by a conflict of interests with other powerful actors. This behaviour entails the presence of several competing elite actors, each of whom has a specific area or community over which they can exert their influence. This section explains how government-sponsored newspapers in particular contained further evidence of discrete, authoritarian hierarchies, consisting of articles that venerated powerful individuals, or their families. The analysis of these articles shows that the specifically Sakha culture discussed in the previous section has a strong influence over practices and attitudes within these hierarchies, particularly when they occur in Sakha communities. The articles concerning elite actors and *kampaneyschina* together suggest that the Sakha understanding of power relationships has the capacity to influence political practice in the Republic as a whole.

Megino-Kangalasskiy *Ulus* has a Sakha-dominated population, as is demonstrated by the publication of its local newspaper, *Erkeeyi*, in Sakha. *Erkeeyi* displayed the influence of Megino-Kangalass' elites through its elaborate celebrations of prominent individuals, and in doing so revealed the hierarchies within the regional community. The entire sample of *Erkeeyi* contained fourteen bi-weekly tabloid editions, ranging in size from four to nine pages, of which half were fully or partially translated. The translated editions produced eleven articles primarily designed to eulogise a specific high-status

Sakha man or woman. These articles can be identified as a distinctive sub-genre within the range of personal celebrations that formed a large part of the government newspaper content in both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia). Unlike the other personal celebration pieces, they did not incorporate either their respective republican governments' legitimising narratives, or tropes common throughout the Russian Federation – such as the idealised accounts of World War Two veterans. *Erkeeyi*'s celebration sometimes took the form of public events held in honour of a specific individual: four of the eleven articles reported on or advertised such occasions.

Erkeeyi's coverage of the *Ysyakh* held to mark the centenary of Gavril Desyatkin's birth consisted of two articles published in consecutive June editions, which together provide representative examples of both the eulogising pieces themselves, and the public events they describe (*Erkeeyi*, June 18, 2004: p. 3; June 25, 2004: p. 1). Desyatkin was born and spent most of his life in Megino-Kangalass. He was the head of Megino-Kangalass' police force, and later became the chief of the Republic's passport service. His family was influential enough to ensure that *Yakutia* also published a report on this event: his son was then a director of the Republic's gold-mining company Yakutzoloto (*Yakutia*, June 24, 2004: p. 6).

Desyatkin comes across as the incarnation of all the virtues *Yakutia* and *Erkeeyi* consistently promote: he was kind, and entirely committed to his work. Both *Yakutia*'s and *Erkeeyi*'s articles emphasise his talent and physical strength, which *Yakutia* implies to have been almost super-human, describing him as an "epic hero" (*bogatyr*). The *Ysyakh* organisers regarded Desyatkin's achievements as valuable enough for them to overlook the probability that, as a

high-ranking police officer in the 1930s, he helped administer the Stalinist repressions. Both articles offered their readers a positive way to imagine Desyatkin's career, when they mentioned that he had helped to solve "difficult and convoluted" crimes – revealing their authors' awareness that he was involved in problematic events. These newspapers are according Desyatkin a status that overrides everyday social norms, including those that might be used to evaluate his past.

Dedicating the *Ysyakh* to Desyatkin conferred a great honour on both the man and his family, as *Yakutia*'s report of the occasion exemplified. The *Ysyakh* is the most important Sakha holiday: Megino-Kangalass' *Ysyakh* would have been a major event for the region's population, rather than an elite-driven show intended to generate newspaper coverage. Megino-Kangalass had a population of 31,400 in 1989, dispersed over a territory of 11,700 square kilometres (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 129). There was very little industrialisation in the region during the Soviet period, so that it lacks the technologically developed urban centres that can be found in other sub-regions. The *Ysyakh* organisers nevertheless succeeded in putting on an *Ysyakh* that included "concerts, a show for the youth, sports tournaments, competitions, market stalls, and horse-racing". The organisers had so much enthusiasm for their task that they "pleasantly surprised" the Desyatkins, by unexpectedly adding two more games to the sports tournament (*Yakutia*, June 24, 2004: p. 6). Whether their efforts were motivated by the "love and respect" *Yakutia* and *Erkeeyi* describe, or a fear of the Desyatkin family's influence, they show that the Desyatkins would be justified in assuming that any call they made on the personal resources of Megino-Kangalass' inhabitants would be answered. The Desyatkins have the kind of

status in Megino-Kangalass that would enable them to employ *kampaneyschina*, if the need arose. The power-relationships that give rise to *kampaneyschina* can therefore occur in Sakha-dominated rural communities, rather than being confined to republican-level elite hierarchies.

Gavril Desyatkin's *Ysyakh* can be taken as an example of a general tendency for Sakha communities to "deify" their leading citizens, as *Nashe Vremya* describes the phenomenon (*Nashe Vremya*, June 25, 2004: pp. 12–13). The editions of *Yakutia* published in June contained ten other displays of a particular Sakha individual's eminent status within their home sub-region, consisting in part of the publication of the celebratory articles themselves in a republican-level newspaper. Like *Erkeeyi*'s celebration pieces, these articles are all distinguished by a clear desire on the part of the author to praise the high-status individuals concerned for the sake of the honour their praise conferred, rather than for any other reason. The commercial newspapers, on the other hand, consistently published celebrations of elite individuals, which had been written 'to order' (*na zakaz*), as Chapter Five describes. The style of these celebrations could sometimes resemble the Sakha veneration in *Yakutia*, although their common *zakaz* function made it impossible to distinguish accurately a specifically Sakha celebration practice from the generalised use of commercial newspaper space to promote ambitious and influential figures.

Some of *Yakutia*'s eulogies were specifically dedicated to their subjects, such as the account of Desyatkin's *Ysyakh* – while other authors incorporated their celebration into pieces that superficially had a variety of different functions. For example, a journalist from Abyyskiy *Ulus* devoted almost a quarter of his piece on the region's administrative difficulties to describing and celebrating the

clan history of one of Abyyskiy *Ulus*' prominent families, the Yefimovs (*Yakutia*, June 1, 2004: p. 2). He pays particular attention to Il'ya Yefimov, regarded as a "legendary individual" in the *Ulus*, who "'pushed through' in the higher echelons [of political power] the building of the new regional centre", during the 1970s. Yefimov and his forebears appear from this article to have been talented, powerful achievers, whose field of endeavour was most often the community they lived in. Abyy's population values the Yefimovs enough to have dedicated a monument to them in Abyy's regional centre, demonstrating the Yefimov family's aristocratic status. As the author describes, Yefimov's "initiative" and "energy" enabled him to overcome the difficulties presented by his aristocratic Sakha origin: a Sakha "prince" (*knyaz*), born in 1785, founded the Yefimov clan.

Both Gavril Desyatkin and Il'ya Yefimov apparently belong to families with long-standing high statuses, maintained through the continuing public celebration of their individual members. The veneration of these powerful dynasties entails a high regard for family networks in general among the Sakha – while the continuing influence of the pre-Soviet aristocratic Yefimov clan suggests that the importance attached to family and genealogy has its roots in pre-Soviet Sakha social organisation. *Sakha Sire* made a passing reference to the "authority of kin and family clans" that "continues until now", in an analytical piece about the federal government's legislation on local administration (*Sakha Sire*, June 29, 2004: p. 3). One of *Nashe Vremya*'s journalists referred to the rural Sakha habit of asking a stranger "where … [he is] from: which *ulus* is his clan from?" (*Nashe Vremya*, June 25, 2004: pp. 12–13). These articles indicate that pre-Soviet Sakha clan hierarchies remain in some areas, while pre-Soviet

notions of family and hierarchy continue to influence contemporary Sakha power relationships – despite the changes in social and economic organisation that have occurred during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. They reflect the influence Sakha family or territorial networks have over contemporary urbanisation processes. According to Tatiana Argounova-Low, rural Sakha make use of traditional kinship systems to obtain jobs and accommodation in Yakutsk (Argounova-Low, 2007b: p. 54).

Further evidence of Sakha clan hierarchies appeared in *Yakutia*, corroborating *Sakha Sire*'s and *Nashe Vremya*'s claims, and revealing the capacity of Sakha clans to act as patronage networks. An analysis piece in *Yakutia* on the federal government's local administration legislation raised the problem of how to ensure sub-regional administrations had adequately qualified staff, since, "At the elections leaders can be chosen who are insufficiently prepared, but who reflect the interests of their numerous relatives" (*Yakutia*, June 3, 2004: p. 2). Another article in *Yakutia* on the liquidation of a private company in Megino-Kangalass mentioned that the General Director had "worked very hard on the building of a school in his home village" (*rodnoye selo*), and "provided places of work for local builders", but "as a result 'burnt out' due to untimely payment for work carried out and the following tax repercussions" (*Yakutia*, June 10, 2004: p. 2). The General Director had diverted the resources he controlled towards a community that is likely to have included members of his family, and which he must have felt had a greater claim on his company's wealth than the shareholders who legally owned it. This article reveals an expectation of patronage capable of influencing elite actors to act against their own professional interests, in addition to the formal stipulations of

republican law. The power and influence of Sakha elites is therefore linked to their capacity to benefit their subject communities.

The emphatic veneration of Desyatkin and Yefimov indicates that the power relationships in Sakha communities do not exist simply as an exchange of elite patronage for influence over a particular group's resources. The 'love and respect' *Yakutia* and *Erkeeyi* ascribed to Desyatkin and Yefimov reveals a belief that prominent figures should be accorded a public expression of obedience, emotional attachment and support, in addition to personal power. This attitude was displayed clearly in one of *Erkeeyi*'s articles, concerning the controversial nineteenth-century Sakha robber (*razboinik*) Vasiliy Manchaary. Manchaary came from Megino-Kangalass and is regarded by some as the Sakha equivalent of Robin Hood. The article consisted of an attack on another newspaper's disparagement of his worth (*Erkeeyi*, June 25, 2004: p. 9). Its author called Manchaary a "worthy property of the people" (*dostoyaniye naroda*), and asserted that "there is nothing worse than marring the name of a national hero". A quotation from the Sakha writer Nikolai Luginov supported the case: "We have a national hero, but other peoples do not. And we should be proud of that!". This author's statements reveal a general belief that communities should celebrate and defend their prominent individuals, while the use of this norm to disparage an opponent entails an assumption that readers will find it familiar and acceptable. A eulogisation of the Sakha academic Georgiy Basharin in *Yakutia* echoed this author's statements, claiming that "a people should know their heroes", and therefore that the late Basharin's contemporaries have a "duty" to "immortalise" his name (*Yakutia* June 8, 2004: p. 4).

The idea that a community owes its elites public demonstrations of

attachment and submission entails the perception of a close relationship between elite actor and citizen, involving both a capacity to accept a lower level of power and agency on the part of ordinary citizens, and their personal identification with their particular group's leading members. This notion of an intimate, yet overtly authoritarian relationship between higher- and lower-status individuals facilitates the popular acceptance of a given elite member's appropriation of other peoples' time, effort and money, creating the social and cultural conditions required for the acts of *kampaneyschina* described in Chapter Five. Its intimacy would characterise small, clan-based groups rather than mass societies, corroborating the suggestion that pre-Soviet attitudes have been integrated into the Sakha people's developing perception and practice of power relations over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Alena Ledeneva, David Lane, and Caroline Humphrey refer to clientalist networks existing throughout the Russian Federation, which in some cases are descended from the late-Soviet *nomenklatura* hierarchies (Ledeneva, 2006: p. 1; Humphrey, 2002: pp. 180, 181; Lane, 1995; Lane et al 2007: p. 14). However, the specific patronage networks that *Sakha Sire*, *Erkeeyi*, *Yakutia* and *Nashe Vremya* indicate, with their strong clan influence, could not exist among Sakha (Yakutia)'s Slavic populations. Only the Sakha can claim an association with prominent regional clans, since the extensive family histories and connections that form the basis of these networks require a longstanding residence in Sakha (Yakutia). As Chapter One outlined, the vast majority of the Republic's Slavic population arrived during the twentieth century, and so would not have had the time to build up either a localised history of family achievement in the Republic, or extended family networks. The attitudes and behaviours within the Sakha

hierarchies just discussed have characteristics that distinguish them from other hierarchical networks in Sakha (Yakutia) and the Russian Federation, which are in part derived from pre-Soviet Sakha practice.

Pre-Soviet Buryat family networks continue to exist in Buryatia, as Chapter Four explained. Celebrations of high-status Buryat individuals appeared consistently in the sample editions of *Buryatia* and *Inform Polis*, also displaying the presence of Buryat hierarchical relationships. However, the Buryat celebration narratives differed from the Sakha pieces, putting a greater stress on the subject's close and affectionate relationship with their friends, families and colleagues, and their commitment to their clans (*rody*) and 'small motherland' (*malaya rodina*).

None of Buryatia's newspapers produced evidence that the elite co-option of lower-status individuals' resources is publicly acknowledged as common practice. The editions of *Inform Polis, Pyatnitsa Plyus, Buryatia* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda* contained much evidence of corrupt behaviour on the part of Buryatia's leading politicians and businessmen; however, these newspapers did not mention or articulate any direct demands for private resources from elite actors. The absence of *kampaneyschina* in Buryatia's newspapers suggests that a distinctive practice within Sakha hierarchies is capable of influencing elite behaviour in the Republic as a whole. The capacity for powerful Sakha individuals to exert their influence in the form of *kampaneyschina* generates an environment where such authoritative acts are acceptable, creating the possibility for non-Sakha to make use of them – such as the Russian President Vyacheslav Shtyrov's acquisition of a five-metre pine tree outside his office window, achieved by means of a 'hint' to Yakutsk's municipal

gardening organisation (*Yakutsk Vecherniy* June 4, 2004: p. 10).

Section 6.2.2: The changing significance of personal talent to Sakha hierarchies

The eulogising articles in Sakha (Yakutia)'s government newspapers showed the intimate relationship between prominent Sakha individuals and their home communities to involve a high regard for personal talent, and public achievement. The role of public achievement revealed by these articles indicates continuities in attitude from early- or pre-Soviet Sakha practice, while other statements manifest an influence from later Soviet and post-Soviet ideologies. The detailed analysis of these articles shows how these differing strands of ideas interact, creating a capacity for contemporary Sakha individuals to have a preoccupation with the worldwide status of the Sakha people itself.

Yakutia's and *Erkeeyi*'s celebration of Yefimov's and Desyatkin's talent and strength suggests that they have achieved their high status in part by excelling over other members of their communities, in public arenas such as sports competitions, or local government (*Yakutia*, June 24, 2004: p. 6; June 1, 2004: p. 2; *Erkeeyi*, June 18, 2004: p. 3). *Yakutia*'s reportage of the Megino-Kangalass *Ysyakh* showed how the enthusiastic proclamation of Desyatkin's outstanding physical strength was incorporated into the event itself, through a "theatrical representation" of Desyatkin's ability to carry a boulder weighing 387 kilograms, and a horse-tethering post that otherwise had to be "dragged" (*tashili*) by ten men. These celebrations are using the depiction of personal talent, manifested in public achievement, as a way of displaying an individual's leading status, indicating that rural Sakha communities place a high value on both public

achievement, and the talent it manifests. *Yakutia* incorporated praise of Megino-Kangalass' gifted and energetic population into the celebration of Desyatkin and his *Ysyakh*, creating an association between Desyatkin's surpassing talent and status, and that of Megino-Kangalass as a whole. This account indicated the value of publicly recognised achievements to be so high that an individual's attainments can be understood to raise the status of their home communities. For example, Tyungyulyu village's inhabitants tried to claim attachment to the overall winner of Desyatkin's *Ysyakh*, telling *Yakutia*'s correspondent, "he's married to a Tyungyulyu girl, that means he's ours". Their desire to associate themselves with the *Ysyakh* winner shows that they expect their village, and therefore also its individual inhabitants, to receive a greater standing as the result of his success.

The author of *Erkeeyi*'s defence of Manchaary, presented in the previous section, shares Tyungyulyu village's understanding of individual achievement and community standing, as does the writer of Basharin's celebration. Their arguments reveal an assumption that the statuses of Manchaary and Basharin are linked to those of the communities with whom they are associated. Their calls for prominent figures to be given their due honour echoes *Yakutia*'s and *Erkeeyi*'s approving descriptions of the 'love and respect' evinced by the inhabitants of Abyy and Megino-Kangalass towards Desyatkin and the Yefimovs, revealing a pattern of behaviour understood to affirm a community and its status through the celebration of prominent community members.

Yakutia's description of the museum dedicated to the Sakha singer Sergey Zveryev reveals similar chains of events and ideas (*Yakutia*, June 8, 2004: p. 7). The journalist commends Ygyatte village's efforts to honour the

memory of its famous inhabitant through building his museum, even though Ygyatte's remote situation limits the number of museum visitors to around 300 per year. This article illustrates the variety of achievements that generate a high status: the surpassing value of public success itself within these Sakha communities has the effect of fusing prominent individuals into a unitary elite, whether they are policemen, politicians, businessmen, aristocrats or cultural workers. The link between community and individual status is another demonstration of how close-knit these communities are – to the extent that community identities, whether related to clan, ethnicity or territory, could have a strong influence on Sakha individuals' perceptions of self-worth. It also suggests that the Sakha are likely to have a personal interest in the careers of their regional politicians and government workers, since the successes and failures of their region's public figures will be understood to affect their own status.

The enormous importance publicly recognised achievement has for these populations implies individual Sakha to have a constant awareness of their own status within their home community – and of the place their home community itself occupies among the range of other groups they perceive in the wider social environment. *Erkeeyi*'s permanent front-page strap-line, "The citizens of Megino-Kangalass are at the top of the mountain", both articulates and encourages this awareness of community status.

The Sakha concern with talent and status expressed in these newspapers evokes the Sakha folk legends collected by Gavriil Ksenofontov during the 1920s and 30s – and in particular, the interaction they represent between the human and spirit worlds (Ksenofontov, 2004). These stories describe the super-human feats performed by the teller's forebears, or prominent Sakha historical

figures such as the Sakha king Tygyn. Some of them mention the talents or abilities bestowed upon individuals by particular spirits. For example, according to one account the goddess Ayyysyt gave Tygyn's grandson a son "of solid and persistent morals", who became his father's "favourite", an "unusually strong and powerful person"; Omogoy describes his servant Elley, the exceptionally strong and wise forefather of the Sakha, as "a person with a divine protector" (Ksenofontov, 2004: pp. 89, 30). The belief that personal attributes are donated by spiritual entities, and therefore that an individual's outstanding ability demonstrates their high standing among specific powerful spirits, explains the close attention the narrators pay to the physical prowess of their heroes, despite the destruction it can cause.

Yakutia's celebrations of Desyatkin and Zveryev contained statements that revealed an awareness, if not full acceptance, of the notion that unusual talent manifests a special relationship with the spirit world. The journalist reporting on Desyatkin's *Ysyakh* described the event as a "great success", "whether it was because the population of Tyungyulyu pleased the spirits of the Earth and nature by dedicating the *Ysyakh* to a good person, or simply because they had made an effort..." (*Yakutia*, June 24, 2004: p. 6). The account of Zveryev's museum mentioned that the unusually windy weather had mysteriously calmed at the exact moment when the public speeches were being made to mark the museum's opening, "as if the otherworldly powers were blessing the initiative" (*Yakutia*, June 8, 2004: p. 7). Its author makes frequent reference to the local allegation that Zveryev was a covert shaman, and hence had been granted a special capacity to interact with 'otherworldly powers' (*potustoronniye sily*) by the spirits themselves, according to the widespread

indigenous Siberian belief (Vitebsky, 2001: pp.10, 34, 61). The journalist's claims about Zveryev's shamanic abilities are intended further to enhance Zveryev's status, creating an impression of Zveryev as a mysterious and truly "exceptional" person, rather than simply a famous and accomplished singer. Zveryev's musical talent appears as the additional attribute of an already outstanding human being, along with his skill in wood-carving and hunting, rather than as the main reason for his fame and status.

These two allusions to a pre-Soviet association between human talent and spiritual power coincided with indications from *Erkeeyi* and *Yakutia* that Megino-Kangalass' "theatrical presentation" of Desyatkin's greatness was a continuation of a 1920s practice, intended to venerate legendary Sakha figures through dramatic representations at the *Ysyakh* (*Yakutia,* June 24, 2004: p. 6). *Erkeeyi*'s celebration of Desyatkin began with an account of his outstanding performance at an *Ysyakh* tournament in 1927; this *Ysyakh* had included a "dramatised presentation about Tygyn Darkhan" (*Erkeeyi*, June 18, 2004: p. 3). *Yakutia*'s report of a 2004 *Ysyakh* at the town of Neryungri in southern Sakha (Yakutia) also mentioned a dramatic presentation of Elley's life story (*Yakutia* June 18, 2004: p. 3). These three passing references suggest that the dramatic performances of Desyatkin's life distinguish him as belonging to a specific class of legendary Sakha historical figure, along with Tygyn and Elley. The incorporation of a twentieth-century actor into this group, by means of an early or possibly pre-Soviet theatrical technique, implies that the pre-Soviet beliefs that generated this reverent attitude continue to exist in some shape or form.

The extremely high value the Sakha currently place on the public exhibition of talent suggests that the beliefs expressed in the 1920s folk legends

have been adapted into contemporary Sakha culture. The exclusive status ascribed to high-achieving individuals or communities correlates with a perception that they are not merely lucky, hard working or gifted, but also fortunate and powerful in the privileged relationship they have with mysterious entities, which act through the forces they control in the material world. This attitude may not necessarily continue to exist as a clearly conceptualised and generally accepted belief; it could instead remain in the form of a habitual motivation to fear and respect the powerful or unusually talented. It could thus also be contributing to the strongly hierarchical structure of contemporary Sakha communities, in addition to the competitive desire for a higher status they create.

However, these indications of a pre-Soviet influence on contemporary Sakha social practice coincided with the consistent appearance of other ideas that strongly resemble a central element within both Soviet and post-Soviet political ideologies. The presence of these ideas suggests that contemporary Sakha attitudes have developed out of an interaction between pre-Soviet notions and the ideas that became prominent during the rapid social and political changes of the twentieth century. As Chapter One described, the various permutations of government ideology during the Soviet period assumed the existence of a universal social goal, which humanity is struggling to attain. Different societies can be evaluated according to the extent of their progress towards this goal, and the contribution they have made to the development of human civilisation in general. The Sakha nationalist movements of the 1980s and 90s also constructed their ideologies within this social evolutionist worldview. For example, the leading nationalist organisation *Sakha Keskile*'s stated aim was to enable "the Sakha people to enter the circle of developed,

civilised countries as a people with their own state" (Ignat'yeva, 1999: p. 105).

A historical materialist conception of society could often be discerned in these articles. For example, the writer of *Yakutia*'s homage to Basharin describes his subject leading him "into the world of science (*nauka*), the history of humanity…" (*Yakutia* June 8, 2004: p. 4). *Nashe Vremya* published an interview with Luginov, the Sakha writer and historian mentioned in *Erkeeyi*'s celebration of Manchaary, who contends that the Sakha are descended from Chinggis Khan's armies (*Nashe Vremya*, June 25, 2004: pp. 12–13). He described his discovery that the Sakha "are not a peripheral small people, but part of a very great nation" as a "new self-definition: national and spiritual". He revealed his historical materialist background most clearly in his remarks about "true civilisation", as opposed to the superficial acquisition of knowledge. This article shows that a historical materialist influence exists outside the government newspapers' discursive space.

The concern about the Sakha people's 'inability to develop' expressed by Luginov suggests that a social evolutionist perspective can appear in public discourse as a fear that the Sakha people are 'undeveloped'. This idea fits in with the perception of inter-ethnic relationships that life in a social environment dominated by public achievement and competition would generate: the world's ethnic groups, or 'nations', exist in a hierarchy determined by their social achievements, like the individuals that make up Sakha communities. Soviet-era allegations that the Sakha are 'uncivilised' and 'undeveloped' apparently continue to excite an apprehension that the Sakha people occupy a low status among this community of nations. The late- and post-Soviet Sakha nationalist ideology is likely to have reinforced the integration of social evolutionism into

the popular Sakha mindset through its emphasis on the Sakha people's level of 'development'. Even the iconoclastic *Yakutsk Vecherniy* displayed a concern with the Republic's international standing, ending a feature complaining about the expense and effort required to stage the *Deti Azii* tournament with the sentence, "**But otherwise, God forbid, the Republic falls face first into the mud in front of half of Russia and 17 foreign countries!** [*Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s bold]" (*Yakutsk Vecherniy,* June 4, 2004: p. 12).

The accounts of Yefimov's and Desyatkin's careers indicate that Yefimov and Desyatkin also raised the statuses of Megino-Kangalass and Abyy by enhancing or demonstrating these communities' level of technological 'development'. Yefimov has accorded Abbyy the status of a 'developed' region by building a regional centre with plumbing, heating and electricity – while Desyatkin's leading position in Sakha (Yakutia)'s police force shows Megino-Kangalass to be 'developed' enough to produce the quality of person and education this role requires. The General Director mentioned in the previous section sacrificed his company to 'developing' his home village, by providing it with a school (*Yakutia*, June 10, 2004: p. 2). *Erkeeyi* contained other statements showing that the imperative for Sakha individuals to work towards 'developing' their communities is a part of the value system consistently expressed by Megino-Kangalass' public discourse. For example, the report of a ceremonial meeting between the head of Megino-Kangalass' administration, V. I. Ptitsyn, and the Megino-Kangalass school-leavers who had won a silver medal for high achievement that year, mentioned a speech expressing the hope that "the school-leavers would make their contribution to the development and prosperity of their home [*rodnoy*] *ulus*" (*Erkeeyi*, June 29, 2004: p. 1). *Erkeeyi*'s statements

suggest that the General Director's decisions were motivated by a popular expectation that he would use his elite status to further his home community's 'progress', in common with the "energetic" Il'ya Yefimov (*Yakutia*, June 1, 2004: p. 2).

All these articles provide evidence that the notions of social evolution underlying Soviet- and post-Soviet ideology and policy have been assimilated into Sakha attitudes and aspirations. The resulting Sakha concern about their level of social 'development' has generated a belief that all people, irrespective of their social position, have a duty towards 'developing' their home communities, and thus also improving their status – whether this 'home community' is perceived as a region, clan, or the Sakha ethnic group itself. These ideas have been absorbed into the relationships between prominent Sakha individuals and their home communities: the extremely high levels of influence they enjoy are understood to repay their active promotion of their peoples' 'progress'. The perceived imperative for all members of a given Sakha community to work towards its progress unites certain Sakha politicians with the ordinary population in an effort to promote and develop the Sakha people. This shared agenda creates a greater possibility for political Sakha nationalist movements to gain a mass following, unlike the Buryat intellectual nationalists, and in doing so provides a motivation for the newspapers' bias towards Sakha themes and concerns, described in Section One: the emphasis *Yakutia* placed on covering the Sakha *Ysyakh* could be designed to placate a strong desire for public recognition on the part of the Republic's Sakha population.

Section 6.3: Cultural change and urbanisation: developing perceptions of Sakha culture

Nashe Vremya and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* in particular showed that Sakha culture and identity are changing rapidly, as more and more rural Sakha become habituated to Yakutsk. The Sakha living in Yakutsk are inevitably more connected to the Russian Federation than those living in remote sub-regions. Many of them conduct their working lives in Russian, since the government organs and federal-level corporations based in Yakutsk generally use Russian. A small urban generation of exclusively Russian-speaking Sakha has appeared, who have to a large extent lost contact with *ulus* life: the 2002 government census found that 6.8 per cent of the Russian Federation's Sakha population no longer speak Sakha (www.perepis2002.ru). These fundamental changes in lifestyle create difficulties in relating to a Sakha identity, since the individuals concerned can no longer participate in contemporary Sakha cultural practice. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* contained indications of an effort to resolve this identity crisis that resembles the development in ideas occurring among Ulan Ude's urbanised Buryat population, described in Chapter Four.

A Sakha identity is a pre-requisite for becoming genuinely integrated into rural Sakha-dominated communities, since it entails the cultural attributes that enable individuals to participate in hierarchical Sakha social networks – and thus also to form close personal relationships with the people around them. It exists as a factor that maintains contemporary Sakha social practices, rather than as a personal characteristic with a tangential effect on daily life. The rural Sakha who move to Yakutsk understandably can be disconcerted at finding young Russian-speaking Sakha, who are apparently indifferent towards their people

and culture and towards their standing in the world community. These rural Sakha incomers are simultaneously faced with an acclimatisation process that encourages them to adopt a Russianised way of life, and in doing so complicates their identification with their Sakha home communities and cultural practices. Argounova-Low's article, mentioned in Section Two, describes how the pressures of maintaining traditional rural kinship networks force some urban Sakha to break off their connection with their rural relatives, preferring to live in the nuclear families characteristic to Russian incomers (Argounova-Low, 2007b: p. 54).

This experience is likely to encourage young rural Sakha to reflect on Sakha culture as a whole, rather than their particular *ulus* community – and also on the prospect of its eventual disappearance, as urbanisation continues. When combined with the difficult transition from rural to urban life, these apprehensions are powerful enough to have generated aggression on the part of some towards the more Russianised Sakha, who in turn can categorise rural incomers as 'thugs' or 'oiks' (*mambety*, *deribasy*). *Yakutia* and *Yakutsk Vecherniy* both contained articles designed to ameliorate a conflict between 'extremist nationalist' rural Sakha, and the 'supercilious' urban youth (*Yakutia*, September 3, 2004: p. 26; *Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 25, 2004: p. 65). This conflict is linked to the street crime and alcohol abuse that have become widespread in Yakutsk: gangs of drunken youths have been known to beat up Sakha passers-by for not being able to speak Sakha. **(This type of occurrence has been mentioned to me by a number of Yakutsk friends.)** The low number of articles *Nashe Vremya* published about Sakha culture, described in Section One, is likely to be another response to a perceived sensitivity about

Sakha culture and identity among Yakutsk's population: one of *Nashe Vremya*'s reporters claimed that Yakutsk's journalists deliberately avoid topics that could aggravate such tensions.

Yakutsk Vecherniy revealed the clash in attitude and practice between rural and Yakutsk-based Sakha populations in several different ways. For example, its account of the search for a haunted tree describes a fourteen-year-old girl acting as a "translator" during a conversation between the article's urbanised Sakha writers, and a group of rural Sakha who could not speak Russian (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, August 21, 2004: pp. 68–69). *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s habitually irreverent treatment of prominent politicians and businessmen, described in Chapter Five, contrasts with the respect *Erkeeyi* and *Yakutia* consistently display towards Sakha (Yakutia)'s elites. *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s urbanised Sakha readers must have a diminished regard for the general Sakha belief that elite figures should be publicly honoured, since they find the opportunity *Yakutsk Vecherniy* offers to laugh at prominent individuals attractive.

However, *Yakutsk Vecherniy* could also publish *zakaz* articles resembling the veneration pieces in *Yakutia* and *Erkeeyi*, described in Section Two. These articles combine with the frequent appearance of Sakha cultural practice in *Nashe Vremya* to show the lack of clarity in the distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' populations and cultures. As Argounova-Low describes, and the *Nashe Vremya* quotation presented in Section One illustrates, the Sakha living in Yakutsk often maintain strong connections with their home regions (Argounova-Low, 2007: p. 56; *Nashe Vremya*, June 4, 2004: p. 3). The extent to which individual Sakha adopt urbanised attitudes must vary a great deal from

person to person, depending in part on the length of time they have lived in Yakutsk. The changes in lifestyle and outlook that are accompanying the urbanisation of Sakha populations are occurring in interaction with a strong influence from rural cultural practice, creating a wide spectrum of 'rural' and 'urban' attitudes.

Another type of article was intended to relax and entertain people with a strong interest in Sakha culture, but who do not necessarily have a deep knowledge of it. Seven of the nine feature articles on Sakha culture produced by the entire *Yakutsk Vecherniy* sample were of this type – indicating *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s predominantly urban audience, and its high proportion of Sakha. They usually translated any Sakha words, and provided information boxes for those with insufficient background knowledge; one article consisted entirely of a list of Sakha proverbs and their meanings (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, September 3, 2004: p. 65). These articles contained narratives flattering to those with a Sakha identity, offering their readers a pleasant way to imagine the Sakha beliefs, practices and ideas that are potentially unfamiliar or embarrassing, in common with *Inform Polis*' articles. Their imaginative solutions to the problem of Sakha cultural change could take very different forms – from a description of the 'yakutisation' (*yakutizatsiya*) of early Russian settlers, implicitly turning the tables on twentieth-century Russification, to the attempt to pacify youth "natiOnalism" (*natsYonalizm*) mentioned above (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 4, 2004: p. 3; June 25, 2004: p. 65).

Two portraits of unusually gifted women, supplemented by the article on Sakha proverbs, presented idealised notions about Sakha culture in association with a specific depiction of 'spiritual' phenomena, like the *Inform Polis* articles

described in Chapter Four (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, August 27, 2004: pp. 68–69; September 3, 2004: p. 64). These pieces suggest that urban Sakha are experiencing a comparable identity crisis to the Russianised Buryat, with the accompanying inclination towards more abstracted, idealised conceptions of their culture. Their narratives offer imaginary representations that relieve the emotional tension caused both by a lack of identification with rural Sakha culture and life, and the contradiction between a lingering willingness to believe in the reality of spiritual agency, and the desire to view oneself as a 'developed', rationalist post-industrial town-dweller. They reveal the continuing influence of the Sakha shamanic tradition, directly through the assertions of quasi-shamanist belief from their subjects and writers, and indirectly through their attraction for those who are excited by the thought of spiritual activity, although they do not overtly subscribe to a shamanist worldview.

These two articles subvert the suggestion that the Sakha, along with their shamanic beliefs, are 'uncivilised' and 'backward', by describing the power of two implicitly Sakha women to confound their materialist, urban interviewers with their spiritual wisdom, and their supernatural abilities to heal and foresee future events. The articles identify the women as Sakha through their personal attributes and practice, including their reported speech – even though the psychic healer in the second piece is in fact Eveny.[33] For example, the psychic healer uses a Russianised form of the Sakha word for female shaman (*udaganka*, from the Sakha *udagan*) to describe her shamaness neighbour, instead of the

[33] As the article mentions, she is from the Eveny village of Sebyan-Kyuel, the site of Piers Vitebsky's ethnographic study *Reindeer People* (Vitebsky, 2005). She is also related to an Eveny friend of mine. However, her originating from Sebyan-Kyuel would not automatically identify her to a Sakha reader in Yakutsk as Eveny, firstly because Sebyan-Kyuel is sufficiently remote to be unfamiliar to a member of Yakutsk's general population, and secondly because the village contains a small Sakha community (Vitebsky, 2005).

Russian word *shamanka*.

These women have psychic gifts that are connected to their intimate relationship with their home territory, along with its local spirits and ghosts. The first article's subject emphasises her "solicitous" attitude towards the natural environment, claiming to live "at one with nature, and nature doesn't offend me". Her deep knowledge of and respect for her local environment enables her to guide the journalists through their interaction with the haunted trees they have come to visit, instructing them on how to avoid falling victim to the area's shamanic spirits. According to their own account, the journalists survive their night under the haunted tree by means of the respectful and careful behaviour the elderly lady has advised – even though all their other informants, including the highly educated Director of Yakutsk's Yaroslavskiy Regional Museum, have assured them they will inevitably come to grief. The journalists' mission was apparently originally motivated by an iconoclastic curiosity and a desire to explode popular superstition, however their scepticism is overcome by their meeting with the elderly lady, and their experience at the haunted tree.

The second article's subject similarly eclipses the capacities of modern bio-medicine and its assumptions, through the psychic powers that were first manifested in unexpected interactions with her area's local spirits and shamans. Her account suggests that she received her special gifts at the behest of these local spirits and shamans. Spirits called to her while she was lost in the forest; her shamaness neighbour told her as a child that she would "give her a little", leaving "at least one". She went on to become a licensed 'bio-energy therapist' (*bioenergoterapeft*) and 'enio-operator' (*eniooperator*) famed throughout Russia, astonishing conventional doctors, elite politicians, and her sceptical interviewer,

by the accuracy of her diagnoses. Like the first article's heroine, she appreciates the powers of her "home earth" (*rodnoye zemlya*), choosing to respect her son's desire to return to Sakha (Yakutia) from Moscow, and remarking, "it's still easier on one's home earth".

These two stories offer urban Sakha readers the opportunity to idealise traditional Sakha culture and shamanism as a profound connection to the land and its forces, rather than experiencing it as a set of unfamiliar rural practices and beliefs. The respectful and intimate relationship with nature displayed by these apparently Sakha women corresponds with their outstanding spiritual gifts, which allow them to surpass the knowledge and achievements of modern science, and its assumptions. Sakha 'backwardness' is transformed into a virtue, since it enables the Sakha to engage with primordial, natural spiritual forces ignored or misunderstood by 'civilised' people. This subversion of modernist norms echoes *Inform Polis*' description of the *Sevden* tournament in Inner Mongolia, presented in Chapter Four. The notion of a unique Sakha relationship with the surrounding environment did not appear in any of the *Erkeeyi* translations, implying it to have a particular relevance for the urban Sakha population.

The first article presents these ideas particularly clearly, juxtaposing the superstitious, unhelpful population of Megino-Kangalass with the wise elderly lady, whose traditional lifestyle and knowledge implies her to be 'truly' Sakha, unlike Megino-Kangalass' other inhabitants. The journalists experience an "incomprehensible feeling of unreality", as they arrive at her little old house in a

forest clearing (*alas*) of "magnificent" beauty, away from the "urban noise".[34] The narrative places the journalists' encounter with the woman, her home and her beliefs in an ambiguous, dreamlike space, distancing it from daily life and thereby introducing the idea of a 'genuine' Sakha culture, which does not necessarily correspond with the readers' immediate experience. The article echoes *Inform Polis*' blurring of ideal and reality in its description of Buryat traditional culture, while both *Yakutsk Vecherniy* articles repeat the association *Inform Polis* makes between spirituality, and non-Russian traditional culture.

The connection these articles make between a positive relationship with local spirits and outstanding personal talent echoes the Sakha shamanic beliefs described in Section Two, placing the two women in the Sakha shamanic tradition. The articles' repetition of these ideas, including their approbation of these outstanding individuals, entails an assumption on the part of the journalists that their urban Sakha readers will find them attractive, even if they do not believe them entirely. This assumption in turn reflects the influence of rural Sakha ideas on the urban Sakha mindset. The representations of 'otherworldly forces' in these articles also correspond to the notions of spirituality that underlie the narratives discussed in Section Two, in that they depict spiritual forces as manifested exclusively through human talent and experience. 'The spiritual' in these articles refers to forces that act within the realm of human health and well-being, having powers both to heal and to harm, rather than to abstracted, self-sufficient entities, as in the Buryat newspapers' representations.

However, the influence of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s urban, non-traditional setting appears in these narratives' depiction of spirituality. The second article in

[34] An *alas* is the Sakha word for a large clearing in the forest; the Sakha traditionally lived and pastured their herds on *alasy*.

particular describes generalised spiritual forces, like the *Inform Polis* articles on spirituality presented in Chapter Four – rather than referring exclusively to specific area spirits. The psychic healer's account moves from the local spirits and shamans of her childhood to the "strong energetic field" the scientific investigators in Moscow discover her to have, and the famous hypnotist Chumak's "good energy"; when books about the psychic Dzhuna, energies (*energetiki*) and karma began to appear, she "swallowed them with rapture, I searched for explanations for all my 'strangenesses'". The article presents the scientific tests that proved her special abilities, her subsequent training course at an institute in Moscow, and the licence she holds, as establishing her veracity – revealing an assumption that spiritual forces can be harnessed by the appropriate techniques and knowledge, achieved and communicated through modern, systematised methods of investigation and education.

One of *Yakutia*'s articles, published in its more populist Friday edition, both articulated and magnified this complex interaction between traditional Sakha, Soviet and post-Soviet influences (*Yakutia*, June 4, 2004: p. 11). The account of its subject, the Sakha psychic Aleksey Svetliy[35], repeated *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s association of personal talent, spiritual forces and Sakha culture, incorporating historical materialist paradigms as the contention that the Sakha people's outstanding spiritual gifts are manifested in their great origins, and their future "mission" in human history. The article followed on from a first interview published in April 2004, in which Svetliy described his various insights and activities – for example, his use of sunbeams to cure illness (*Yakutia*, April 16, 2004: p. 11; *Yakutia*, June 4, 2004: p. 11). Like *Yakutsk*

[35] The Russian adjective *svetliy* means light. Svetliy used both the Russian and Sakha equivalents (*syrdyk*, Sakha) as his pseudonym.

Vecherniy's articles, these pieces depict the spiritual as a selection of mysterious, generalised forces that can be both controlled and verified by systematic, quasi-empiricist techniques, whose agency concerns human health, well-being and achievement. For example, Svetliy has managed to capture sunbeams with magical healing properties in a series of photographs, which "warm" the hands of his interviewer; he heals unlucky village communities by cleaning their "biosphere".

Svetliy amplifies *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s suggestion that the 'backward' Sakha have a uniquely advantageous relationship with nature's hidden forces, telling his admiring interviewer in both pieces that the Sakha are a unique people, "guests on Earth, destined for the creation of the sixth race [the great people of the future]. … We are people of the Sun" (*Yakutia*, June 4, 2004: p. 11). He claims in the first interview that the Sakha people are descended from the lost island of Atlantis:[36]

A long, long time ago there was one language on Earth – Sanskrit, the language of the fourth race, the sole language of the Atlantis peoples. There was a very developed civilisation on the continent of Atlantis. Our atomic energy was child's play for them. That 3-metre high folk called itself Sakha, like us. If we take just the names of their islands: Suk khadara (Sanskrit) – Khadaara suokh (Yakut) – there isn't any inconsistency; Azorida – As aryyta – island with food, Kanariyya – Khanaryya – vertical cliffs. Even the descriptions of the Atlantis islanders' holidays do not differ at all from the Yakut Ysyakh… (Yakutia, April 16, 2004: p. 11.) [*Yakutia*'s italic script]

Svetliy makes the Sakha people's close connection to the spiritual world clear in

[36] The Russian word for Sakha is *yakut*. The Sakha usually refer to themselves as *yakuty* when writing or speaking in Russian, however they also use the Sakha word *sakha*. I have followed the author's or translator's usage in my translation into English.

his explanation of a set of runes in the Sakha-dominated Taatta sub-region, left by a nineteenth-century white shaman who "knew the ancient runic script", and is implicitly a precursor to Svetliy. The runes convey a message to the Sakha about their destiny as the sixth race, from an individual whose shamanic status entails a direct relationship with the mysterious spiritual forces that could enable him to see the future. The shaman's communication expresses the spiritual world's good will towards the Sakha, which is also manifested by their outstanding origin, destiny and achievements, and by the amazing talents of Sakha individuals, such as the shaman and Svetliy himself. Svetliy's emphasis on the Atlantis islanders' "very developed civilisation" reveals the historical materialism that underlies his contentions. His claim that the revival of the planet will start from Sakha (Yakutia), "the most ecologically clean place on Earth", echoes *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s assertion of the Sakha people's unusually harmonious relationship with the natural world, which undermines the apparently 'developed' nations' superior status.

The same journalist conducted both interviews. She mentions in her introduction to the second that "the publication about Aleksey Svetliy … generated quite a few readers' responses. Some were seeking help… Others were indignant, asking why charlatans should be advertised". However, there were clearly enough positive responses for her to believe she could publish a second interview without seriously damaging either her own reputation, or *Yakutia*'s. She expresses her admiration for him openly in both articles, and so must have been confident from the start that she was attaching her name to material that most people would accept, although they might not take it literally. *Yakutia*'s June sample contained three other articles, making less extreme but

nevertheless comparable claims about the Sakha people's spiritual and cultural heritage (*Yakutia* June 25, 2004: pp. 11, 13, 14). The popular Friday editions in the August and September sample contained similar pieces, showing that such articles are a regular, if relatively unusual, part of *Yakutia*'s more populist content. *Yakutia*'s journalists must perceive the apparent status of Sakha culture to have a profound importance for some individuals, if they are including this material in the edition designed to attract readers through providing pleasure. The attraction this type of speculation has implies a deeper popular worry both about the Sakha people's current 'underdevelopment' and their future, corresponding to the disorientation contemporary urbanisation and cultural change must be producing. The interaction of traditional Sakha and non-traditional elements in these narratives shows how the confusion and identity crisis generally associated with rapid cultural change have been exacerbated by a longstanding Sakha concern with their people's status, resulting in these newspapers' extreme allegations.

Svetliy is offering *Yakutia*'s readers another idealised vision of Sakha culture, extending *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s narrative to make an acknowledgement of Sakha identity entail a specific spiritual belief, like the *Inform Polis* articles described in Chapter Four. He implies the alleged status and achievements of the Sakha people to have a spiritual dimension – as does Luginov, when he mentions that his discovery of the Sakha people's illustrious forbears has changed his 'spiritual self-definition' (*Nashe Vremya*, June 25, 2004: pp. 12–13). The challenges associated with urbanisation are producing narratives that inflate the preoccupation with the Sakha people's world status into a spiritual concern.

The Republican government's permission of these articles to appear in

its own ‘flagship’ newspaper, despite their potential to irritate Sakha (Yakutia)’s non-Sakha citizens, constitutes a public acknowledgement that a strong sensitivity about Sakha culture exists among the Sakha population. The decision to countenance this sensitivity, rather than attempt to stifle it, implies a perception of it as a potentially dangerous phenomenon which has to be carefully managed. The current and future state of Sakha culture is a highly emotive subject for both rural and urban Sakha. Its development will continue to have a deep personal significance for many: it is this personal concern with Sakha culture that could in the right circumstances generate another ‘Sakha revival’.

Section 6.4: The republican government’s legitimisation narrative and Sakha Nationalist ideology

The Republican government faces a similar imperative to legitimise its position as Buryatia’s administration: the poor quality of government in Sakha (Yakutia), as demonstrated by the Republic’s newspaper narratives, is discussed in Chapter Five.

The discourse analysis of *Yakutia* revealed a tendency to celebrate individual members of the Republic’s population, and in doing so to promote a repeated narrative about an idealised ‘ordinary citizen’ of Sakha (Yakutia). *Yakutia*’s June sample, consisting of 20 newspapers, contained 23 of these articles; they therefore form one of *Yakutia*’s common regular genres. As Chapter Four described, *Buryatia*'s narratives about high-status individuals would refer to their enhanced awareness of spirituality, morals and culture –

meanwhile its positive accounts of 'ordinary' workers, published to celebrate their particular worker's holiday, tended to focus on their own and their institution's professional achievements. *Yakutia*'s biographical features instead celebrate the values and activities of an idealised 'proletariat', presented via descriptions of individual agricultural or industrial workers' lives. These articles' subjects are often middle-aged or elderly lower-status workers, such as street cleaners or bus drivers (*Yakutia*, June 8, 2004: p. 2; June 2, 2004: p. 2.). Their stories describe the achievements they made through their unselfish devotion to the common cause, hard work and patience, rather than their spirituality and artistic talent.

The narrative these articles repeat projects a notion of Sakha (Yakutia) as disadvantaged by its climate but nevertheless as making considerable economic, technological and social progress through the committed efforts of its population and government, reproducing the historical materialist paradigms appearing in the Sakha articles described above. The articles' subjects present the Republic's rapid development by describing the harsh conditions they have experienced over the course of their lives. For example, a 75-year-old paediatrician tells of how she was given a dormitory bed on her arrival in Sakha (Yakutia) just after the war, and had to make a pillow by stuffing a pillow-case with hay (*Yakutia*, June 8, 2004: p. 4):

> The first antibiotics, the first hormones, the first intravenous injections – all that came about during our time. We didn't spare ourselves. Once I became infected with a children's illness – chicken pox. … I went to work, but… on foot, through the whole town. It wasn't possible to go by bus – you'd infect others. (*Yakutia*, June 8, 2004: p. 4.)

The article subjects are optimistic about the future despite the hardships they have endured, to which they have often made an additional contribution in the form of their promising children and grandchildren.

The values and ideas these articles present always correlate with the public statements and activities of the republican politicians themselves, as they appear in *Yakutia*. The idea of Sakha (Yakutia) as a difficult northern territory, with a political establishment and population bent on making progress, is consistently reiterated in the political statements made during public events. An example is Shtyrov's congratulation message to the Vilyuisk power-station's builders on the day of its opening:

> The Vilyuisk power station has no equivalent in the world: it is the first and, for the moment, the only hydroelectric power station built on permafrost. Its creation was made possible thanks to the professionalism, the selfless work, and the commitment to the project of a numerous collective of power station builders, and it demanded the making of many unique technical decisions, and the development of new technologies.
>
> In front of us stands the necessity to do much, in order for the power station to work to its full capacity, and we have the strength to do this. … (*Yakutia*, September 8, 2004: p. 1.)

The correlation between the attitudes projected by *Yakutia*'s repetitive biographies, and those expressed by the Republic's politicians, shows that their common narrative is part of the republican government's self-legitimisation technique. It creates the possibility for readers to build the contentions made by politicians into their imagination of Sakha Yakutia's 'reality'. The similarity in character between these 'ordinary members' of Sakha (Yakutia)'s population, and the patient, hard-working people described by the politicians, makes it

possible to regard these individuals as living proof that the official narrative is relevant to Sakha (Yakutia)'s context and history. In addition, the importance *Yakutia* ascribes to the 'ordinary person', implied by its publication of so many articles about them, corroborates the politicians' claims to be working for and alongside their people. Sakha (Yakutia) is implied to have the type of government that values its hard-working citizens as associates in a universal mission to develop the Republic, while events such as the opening of the Vilyuisk power station are the tangible results of this mission's progress. The government initiatives themselves are thereby incorporated into an accessible and positive representation of the republican government, its people and their relationship. This representation would appear to encourage the formation of a non-ethnic republican identity, since it invites Sakha (Yakutia)'s citizens to focus on the economic and social development of their difficult, northern territory, rather than on its ethnic groups – while having a particular attraction for a Sakha population worried about their level of 'development'.

However, *Yakutia* and *Sakha Sire* also published articles which incorporated the historical materialist perspective into Sakha nationalist allegations that assumed Sakha (Yakutia) to be a project to further the Sakha people's development, rather than a territorial administrative unit within the Russian Federation. These articles superficially appear to contravene the republican government's own interests, since they have the power to anger both a federal government with a centralising agenda, and the Republic's non-Sakha population. For example, an article with the headline, "In the name of the Sakha Republic's prosperity" represented contemporary Sakha (Yakutia) as the continuation of the early Soviet Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

(ASSR), with the same aim to promote industrial, economic and social development (*Sakha Sire*, June 18, 2004: p. 3). It displayed a strong historical materialist influence, as its emphasis on the Yakut Republic's 'development' illustrates. The article presented the Yakut ASSR's technological and economic achievements to be entirely due to the foresight and energy of its Sakha leaders, and in particular Maksim Ammosov, before he was purged in 1938 (*Sakha Sire*, June 18, 2004: p. 3). Its claim that Ammosov "intuitively chose the way of development for his native people" (*rodnoi narod*) implies Ammosov was using the Yakut ASSR to promote Sakha 'progress' in particular, portraying Sakha (Yakutia) as a specifically Sakha government institution, rather than the component of a multi-ethnic federal state. *Sakha Sire* is also capable of publishing strong criticism about the Putin administration itself, claiming for example that the federal government was trying to liquidate the federal budget deficit by passing its financial responsibilities on to the regions (*Sakha Sire*, September 1: p. 3).

Yakutia devoted an entire broadsheet page to the former President Mikhail Nikolayev's inauguration of the federation-wide Association of Publications of the Northern Territories (*AIST*) (*Yakutia*, June 9, 2004: p. 4). Nikolayev led the moderate Sakha nationalist movement behind the Sakha 'national revival', which caused the current Republic to be established. He initiated the *AIST* himself, intending it to "unite creative powers and create a common information space for the Russian North". Its creation demonstrates that Nikolayev had not given up on his earlier attempts to form an Arctic coalition dominated by Sakha (Yakutia), which would defend the interests of those living in the North – thus providing a means for northern regions to exert a

stronger influence over federal government policy. Another of *Yakutia*'s contributors praised Nikolayev's initiative, claiming that the Sakha people's "main historical mission" was to unite and lead a northern coalition. This article repeats *Sakha Sire*'s intimation that Sakha (Yakutia) is a specifically Sakha polity, using a similar historical materialist paradigm, as the reference to the Sakha people's 'historical mission' shows (*Yakutia*, June 8, 2004: p. 3).

Four long statements from Nikolayev appeared in the 20 editions of *Yakutia* published over June 2004; equivalent articles were also published during the second sample period. He therefore retains enough influence in Sakha (Yakutia) to have access to *Yakutia*'s discursive space, along with the authors of the other pro-Sakha articles. Politicians with Sakha nationalist leanings are likely to be closely integrated into the non-Sakha political mainstream, since they are able to publish their polemic in the republican government's official mouthpieces. *Yakutia*'s and *Sakha Sire*'s articles reveal the continuing presence of the politicians who organised the Sakha national revival in the Republic's political establishment, despite the federal government's dominance.

Sakha nationalists do not have an obvious role in the republican government's legitimating strategy, as do the Buryat nationalist intellectuals. As is described in Chapter Four, Buryat nationalist intellectuals help their government to organise the public events intended to display its high intellectual and cultural level. This is likely to have given nationalist intellectuals the political leverage to publish articles in *Buryatia*, which concentrate on promoting Buryat culture and spirituality. They occasionally insinuated that the Buryat have a more profound and spiritual relationship with Buryatia's landscape; however, they never went as far as to suggest that the Republic of

Buryatia is essentially a Buryat state. Sakha (Yakutia)'s government publicity by contrast revolves around its promotion of the Republic's economic, technological and social progress, and so does not depend on Sakha nationalist intellectuals.

The consistent appearance of a historical materialist narrative in *Erkeeyi*, *Yakutia* and *Sakha Sire* implies a continuity of attitude between rural Sakha communities and their leaders, and republican-level Sakha politicians. Nikolayev and his sympathiser appear to be continuing Ammosov's effort to 'develop' the Sakha, by promoting a powerful Northern coalition headed by Sakha politicians – just as Desyatkin and Yefimov have 'developed' their home *ulusy*. Sakha politicians influenced by a general imperative to facilitate the Sakha people's progress are likely to be positioned throughout the Republic's levels of government. Some of them will be sub-regional administrators, motivated to raise their own standing by promoting that of their local community, while others are the Members of Parliament who publish pro-Sakha articles in *Sakha Sire* and *Yakutia*. Shtyrov's administration is faced with a desire for Sakha prominence that is both deeply rooted in contemporary Sakha cultural practice, and held by a significant group within the government itself. It has clearly found a way to balance the conflicting interests among its members and subject population, which incorporates both the tolerance of *Sakha Sire*'s and *Yakutia*'s Sakha nationalist authors, and the social evolutionist legitimisation narrative described above.

However, the social evolutionist influence over the republican government's public representation creates the capacity for it to perpetuate the Sakha sensitivity about their level of 'development', along with the attraction of

historical materialist Sakha nationalist arguments. *Sakha Sire*'s and *Yakutia*'s nationalist articles claimed the Sakha to have a uniquely harmonious relationship with Sakha (Yakutia)'s landscape, like the populist articles described in Section Two, suggesting that a Sakha nationalist argument has become absorbed into popular discursive spheres, and hence that the compromise the republican government has achieved between its various factions could ultimately backfire. Nikolayev referred to a generalised 'northern personality' throughout his *AIST* article, as might be expected in a statement apparently directed towards all of the Federation's northern territories:

> In the North from time immemorial it has been thought that, in the places settled by human beings, the earth is ennobled, rather than becoming mean. Even the first Russian settlers noted the surprising capacity of Yakuts to render habitable what seemed to be lifeless earth: put a Yakut on the top of an icy cliff, they wrote, and soon you will find with surprise a high-quality dwelling, from the chimney of which winds a warm stream of smoke, and next to it a hospitable decorated horse-tether – a *serge* [Sakha]. (*Yakutia*, June 9, 2004: p. 4.)

Nikolayev insinuates that the Sakha have a unique understanding of the northern environment. Nikolayev's supporter called for particular efforts to be made on behalf of the Sakha communities in the far North, whose "love" for and skill with their environment entitled them to lead the North's future development (*Yakutia*, June 8, 2004: p. 3). The *AIST* page also contains an article claiming that the Arctic is the birthplace of the Aryan, and therefore Indo-European, civilisation, echoing Svetliy's contentions about the Sakha people's role in the origin of human development (*Yakutia*, June 9, 2004: p. 4).

Conclusion:

The integration of pro-Sakha politicians into the Republic's entire governing system maintains Sakha loyalty towards the Republic's government, and thus prevents the possibility of a radicalised, anti-government Sakha nationalist movement. As Chapter Five explained, Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers show a much higher level of public interest and engagement with the political sphere than in Buryatia. If the federal government were to merge Sakha (Yakutia) with its neighbours, as it proposes to merge Buryatia, it would alienate the Sakha population from their regional government, by breaking up Sakha political and community hierarchies. It would also exacerbate the Sakha's suspicion and dislike of the federal government.

The present elite in Sakha (Yakutia) are able to manage the Sakha desire for autonomy in such a way that the republican government acts as a buffer between the Sakha population and its politicians, and the federal government. Shtyrov and his administration are capable of compromising the requirements imposed by the federal government's centralising policy on the one hand, and pro-Sakha politicians on the other, since for the time being the uneasy combination of Sakha or Russian politicians and businessmen that controls Sakha (Yakutia) continues to remain in place. The federal government therefore has an interest in Shtyrov remaining in power, despite his administration's tolerance of Sakha nationalists.

The influence of the historical materialist perspective would lead many Sakha to view the removal of the 'Sakha Republic' as the Federal government's attempt to hinder the development of the Sakha people – while the importance

individual Sakha can attach to their people's progress makes such an attempt a powerful reason to regard the federal government as their enemy. The Sakha cannot but be aware of their small number, in comparison with the Russian populations that surround the Republic, and so are unlikely ever to aspire to genuine independence from the Russian Federation. However, they inhabit and to a large extent administer a territory with a crucial significance for the Russian Federation's economy; some of them, such as Desyatkin's son, occupy key positions within the natural resource industries that generate so much of Russia's wealth. A powerful feeling of resentment towards the federal government could create major problems for Russia as a whole, especially if the federal government itself showed signs of instability. These factors have created a scenario whereby the federal and republican governments indirectly encourage the current Sakha tendency to place an exaggerated value on their people's progress, despite the interest both organs have in minimising the significance of Sakha identity.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: ethnicity and politics in the Russian Federation

Introduction:

This research project set out to investigate the political significance of non-Russian identity in the Russian Federation, treating the popular perception of non-Russian identity itself as a phenomenon heavily influenced by ideological and cultural developments initiated during the Soviet period. The study used content and discourse analyses of regional newspapers to identify the contemporary formulation and relevance of the Soviet-era notion of 'ethnicity'. This method has been designed around the assumption that mass media help to develop the shared networks of ideas integrating mass societies and their cultures, by enabling individuals to form relationships with repetitive public narratives. Another assumption has been that consistent behaviours and attitudes distinguish one cultural community from another, determined by collective intellectual and emotional apprehensions. The ideas consistently repeated by mass media narratives can thus reflect trends in the cultural development of a society. Meanwhile, the presence in Siberia of newspapers that act explicitly as mouthpieces for their government owners creates the possibility of comparing official discourse with that designed to attract a mass audience.

The first section of this chapter summarises the appearance and

treatment of both abstracted notions of ‘ethnic culture’ and specifically Buryat and Sakha cultural traits as they appear in the newspaper material under analysis. It explains how the newspaper content reveals distinct cultural developments, generated by a mix of economic, demographic and social factors. The second section is based on a qualitative analysis of the newspaper discourse on Buryat and Sakha culture. It shows how the cultural development presented in the first section incorporates strategies of political legitimisation, shedding light on the nature of the governance in both Republics. This section also identifies the role Buryat and Sakha nationalists have in their respective political contexts. The final section discusses this cultural development from a federation-wide perspective, in order to interpret its relevance for the republican and federal governments.

The newspaper material used in this investigation shows that non-Russian ethnic cultures and identities form part of a development of attitudes and practices, which is stimulated in part by the problems caused by a lack of effective governance at both regional and federal levels. Non-Russian ethnic identity is thus closely integrated into the development of the Russian Federation, as part of a flow of personal and political strategies that replaces the creation of independent, functional state institutions.

Section 7.1: Buryat and Sakha Cultural Development

The Republican-level government-sponsored dailies, *Buryatia* and *Yakutia*, showed a tendency to posit an abstracted category of ‘ethnic culture’, which resembled the Soviet-era notions of ‘ethnic culture’ described in Chapter One.

This conception of 'ethnic culture' implied the distinctions between Russia's 'ethnic cultures' to consist mainly of the differences between their traditional ways of life. The portrayals of Russian, Buryat, Sakha and Tungus cultures in *Buryatia* and *Yakutia* usually referred to what are regarded as traditional religious practices or cultural production, thus creating a division between these 'ethnic cultures' and modern life. This implicit distinction made it possible for *Buryatia* and *Yakutia* to represent the relevance of individual ethnic identity as confined to cultural production and religious affiliation – which in turn helped their promotion of pan-ethnic republican identities, with a direct connection to contemporary politics and economics. Standardising the nature of ethnic culture in this way also made it easier for the government newspapers to devote approximately equal levels of attention to their Republics' specific ethnic cultures, thus emphasising their governments' commitment to all the different ethnic groups living on their territories. **These government newspapers were therefore continuing the Soviet tendency to 'flag' a specific conception of ethnicity within their representation and legitimisation of their Republican states, in a similar way to the regular 'flagging' of Western nationhood described by Michael Billig (Billig 1995).**

These newspapers' representation of ethnic culture implies that both governments regard it as having a strong and potentially threatening significance for their populations, since their media organs are producing articles apparently designed to promote alternative pan-ethnic republican identities, while making a conciliatory display of good-will towards their populations' varying ethnic affiliations. This political communication had been developed for audiences with strong affiliations to specific Buryat, Sakha, Russian or Tungus cultural

traditions, which could be generally understood to fall within an abstract category of 'ethnic culture'. It also reveals a perception that this notion of 'ethnic culture' has the potential to arouse popular feeling. The simultaneous assimilation and adaptation of the ideas associated with Soviet nationalities ideology described in Chapters One and Two is continuing, as are the political attempts to manage the individual perception of non-Russian identity.

The content analysis of commercial newspaper discourse produced results that corroborated the impressions made by the government newspapers' careful representation of ethnic culture. All the commercial newspapers in the study contained articles appealing to an attachment to a specific ethnic identity and culture. Their journalists therefore regarded their target audiences' ethnic affiliation as a factor that had to be considered in their formulation of an attractive, commercially viable newspaper. The commercial newspapers offered their readers flattering, informative articles about Russian, Buryat or Sakha cultural traditions, in addition to statements that could immediately be identified as arising out of a specific Russian, Buryat or Sakha cultural outlook. These statements could refer to an activity universally acknowledged to be Russian, Buryat or Sakha in particular, such as Sakha horse herding, or display an understanding of events that corresponded with recognisably Russian, Buryat or Sakha attitudes.

The commercial newspaper content indicates that the government newspapers' definition of 'ethnic culture' is generally familiar and acceptable to their populations, since commercial newspapers that consistently present their Republics' ethnic groups in terms of their cultural traditions are able to attain mass audiences. However, the occasional manifestations of ethnic-specific ideas

in these commercial newspapers show that ethnic identities in these Republics are connected to distinct sets of attitudes and practices, as well as to the pre-Soviet cultural traditions described in government newspapers – whether the authors of these statements were consciously reproducing a particular cultural habit, or were incidentally revealing their own Russian, Buryat or Sakha background. Non-Russian cultures that are capable of influencing personal reactions to current events therefore continue to exist in these Republics, although they may differ only slightly from the Russian Federation's contemporary mainstream Russian culture.

The commercial and government newspapers are adjusting their communication both to their audiences' perceived identification with a particular ethnic cultural tradition, and to the influence these cultural traditions themselves have on contemporary Russian, Buryat and Sakha outlooks. Their content reveals that the Soviet idea of 'ethnic culture' continues to develop as a relevant notion within these Republics' current ethnic identifications, as do the pre-Soviet Buryat and Sakha cultures themselves. The journalists working on all these newspapers are behaving as if they understand ethnic culture and identity to be integrated into their audiences' emotional lives, while the government newspaper content shows ethnic culture and identity to be the subject of political policy. Ethnic culture in its various forms retains the capacity it acquired during the Soviet period to engender an interaction between government policy and personal identity.

Despite these similarities, there are intriguing and profound differences between the Buryat and Sakha cases. The commercial newspaper content showed that

Sakha (Yakutia)'s journalists are more concerned about the Sakha population than their colleagues in Buryatia are about the Buryat – even to the extent that they prioritised Sakha interests over those of their Russian audiences. The content analysis data corroborated the evidence from interviews with locals who believed that Buryatia's commercial newspapers are directed towards particular ethnic groups. The distinction made by Buryatia's journalists between a Russian or Buryat audience is striking; so too is the fact that they clearly do not fear local resentment when publishing a 'Russian' newspaper. Buryatia's journalists do not seem to believe that the Buryat commonly have either a sense of exclusive ownership over the republican state, or a corresponding capacity to involve the Republic's political establishment in pursuing the interests of their ethnic group.

Neither of Sakha (Yakutia)'s commercial newspapers showed evidence of a Russian bias, instead directing the few articles they published on ethnic culture towards a Sakha audience. This suggests that obviously 'Russian' or 'Sakha' newspapers do not exist in Sakha (Yakutia)'s mainstream Russian-language public sphere. If Sakha (Yakutia)'s journalists did believe that their audiences' ethnic identities warranted their targeting one ethnic group in particular, then it might be expected that either *Yakutsk Vecherniy*, *Nashe Vremya*, or the regional supplement of *Argumenty i Fakty* for Sakha (Yakutia) would try to gain a larger share of the Russian audience, since these are the Republic's most prominent Russian-language commercial newspapers. The Russian-language newspapers would be less likely to aim for a Sakha audience, since the Sakha-language commercial newspapers would naturally be more likely to attract readers who wanted specifically Sakha newspapers.

Neither *Nashe Vremya* nor *Yakutsk Vecherniy* were as careful as Buryatia's *Inform Polis* to maintain impartiality towards both ethnic groups. Their editors apparently do not believe that the risk of displeasing their Russian audience was important enough to prevent them from devoting more attention to Sakha cultural themes, while tending to avoid the discussion of ethnic culture per se. Although both newspapers are keen to attract both Russian and Sakha readers, there is a subtle bias towards their Sakha audience. This combines with the absence of prominent 'Russian' newspapers to suggest that Sakha (Yakutia)'s journalists place a higher importance on the reactions of their Sakha target audiences. The reason for this may well be that Yakutsk's population, which forms the bulk of their target audience, now contains a higher proportion of Sakha than Slavs, as *Yakutsk Vecherniy* mentioned (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, August 27, 2004: pp. 4–5). It could also reflect the apprehension that an apparently 'Russian' commercial newspaper might offend a Sakha belief in their right to regard Sakha (Yakutia) as their 'own' state. 'Russian' commercial newspapers might be able to exist in Sakha (Yakutia)'s Russian-dominated industrial towns, but their provincial location would be likely to limit their relevance for the entire Republic.

The government newspapers in both Republics also showed a variation in the amount and quality of nationalist articles they published. This variation corroborated the commercial newspapers' indications of the different levels of influence the Buryat and Sakha have over their respective republican states. Although both *Buryatia* and *Yakutia* attempted to demonstrate impartiality towards the different ethnic groups living in their Republics, *Yakutia* felt able to abandon this principle when celebrating specifically Sakha events, such as the

Ysyakh. *Yakutia* also published Sakha nationalist claims that had much wider implications for the Russian Federation than the Buryat nationalist articles in *Buryatia*. The most explicit Buryat nationalist article made defensive allegations about successive Russian governments' intentions to dominate the Mongolian peoples (*Buryatia* June 12, 2004: p. 4). Other articles in *Buryatia* emphasised the value of Buryat culture and religion but were similarly cautious, sometimes decrying the Soviet-era repression of Buryat cultural expression, or hinting that the Buryat had a special, spiritualised relationship with Buryatia's landscape.

Yakutia's nationalist pieces could make positive assertions that concerned the Russian Federation's state institutions, and their policies. In particular, an insinuation that the Sakha cultural heritage gives the Sakha a particular right to govern northern areas was made in various different ways. The most radical formulation of this argument also asserted that the Sakha should take the lead in uniting the Russian Federation's northern regions with the world's other sub-Arctic territories, in order to create a global coalition of northern peoples (*Yakutia* June 9, 2004: p. 4; *Yakutia* June 8, 2004: p. 3.). *Yakutia*'s nationalist articles could therefore express pretensions towards a higher level of political power for the Sakha. *Yakutia* also occasionally published populist articles insinuating that the Sakha cultural tradition is 'greater' than any other. These pieces used the concept of 'ethnic culture' explained above, but instead of using it to represent ethnic culture as a selection of equally valuable cultural traditions, they implied the various 'ethnic' traditions to have differing levels of value, according to their level of 'development', or 'progress'. While *Buryatia*'s nationalist articles always portrayed the Buryat people as a participant in the Soviet-era notion of a

'friendship of peoples' (*druzhba narodov*), *Yakutia*'s pieces could use the idea of cultural 'progress', another strand within Soviet nationalities theory, to ascribe a unique status to the Sakha.

The content of *Buryatia* and *Yakutia* also revealed the different roles Buryat and Sakha nationalists play in their respective republican governments. As the appearance of provocative Sakha nationalist articles in *Yakutia* might indicate, there are politicians with Sakha nationalist sympathies that have the power to influence Sakha (Yakutia)'s government policy, at least in some areas. For example, the republican government's Children of Asia (*Deti Azii*) sports tournament was launched by means of a specifically Sakha theatrical display. The series of *Deti Azii* tournaments is intended to raise Sakha (Yakutia)'s international profile as a self-sufficient state, and in doing so to increase the likelihood that foreign investors will approach the republican government directly, rather than via the federal administration. Sakha (Yakutia) was thus presented to the tournament's foreign participants as a Sakha state, despite its Russian President and large Russian population. The prominence of Sakha imagery in major government displays, such as the *Deti Azii* tournament, reflects the power of Sakha politicians publicly to emphasise the importance of the Sakha to the republican state.

Meanwhile, the Buryat cultural presentation in Buryatia's state occasions was balanced by an equivalent Russian show, echoing *Buryatia*'s impartial portrayal of the different ethnic cultural traditions that exist within the Republic's overarching state structure. The Buryat nationalists were constantly involved in organising the republican government's publicity events, apparently maintaining their capacity to publish in *Buryatia* by performing this service. As

Buryatia showed, Buryatia's government legitimises itself by demonstrating its commitment to high culture and education, which requires it to collaborate with the Republic's prominent academics and cultural producers, many of whom are Buryat nationalist intellectuals. These Buryat nationalists therefore are part of Buryatia's political establishment; however, their power to convert their pro-Buryat agitation into a genuine political influence is very limited.

The varying Buryat and Sakha nationalist influence over their Republics' politics appear to correlate with the different levels of concern the newspapers displayed towards their Russian and non-Russian audiences. In sum, the newspapers show that Sakha culture exerts a much stronger influence over its Republic's general context than Buryat, while consisting of a more coherent and distinct set of practices, attitudes and identities. This finding corresponds with the large proportion of Sakha in Sakha (Yakutia)'s population (45.5 per cent, instead of the 27.8 per cent of Buryat in Buryatia's population). It also reflects the state-building programmes carried out by Sakha (Yakutia)'s nationalist-dominated administration during the 1990s, made possible by the income they received from the Republic's natural resources.

The distinctive Sakha culture was revealed in the content analysis as a greater tendency for Sakha (Yakutia)'s commercial newspapers to refer to Sakha culture as contemporary practice rather than past tradition. By contrast, Buryatia's commercial newspapers showed a greater preoccupation with traditional Buryat history, religion and culture. *Inform Polis*, in particular, consistently supplied information to attract a reader with the personal interest in Buryat culture that would accompany a Buryat identity, but without a confident sense that they

understood it. The common references to Sakha cultural practices in Sakha (Yakutia)'s commercial newspapers showed that the Sakha have more opportunities to relate their Sakha identity to easily distinguishable Sakha habits and ideas, and so do not necessarily have the same need to come to an understanding of their own cultural tradition. The exception was *Yakutsk Vecherniy*, which occasionally offered idealised representations of Sakha culture that made a similar appeal to a reader's sense of alienation from their Sakha identity. These articles indicated that some Sakha also have reason to question the meaning of their Sakha identity, despite their exposure to a distinct and influential Sakha culture. *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Inform Polis* have predominantly urban readerships, based in Yakutsk and Ulan Ude respectively. Their articles on Sakha and Buryat culture are therefore designed for the Sakha and Buryat who live in these towns – which suggests that urban Sakha and Buryat in particular are prone to doubt ethnic identities.

The varying proportions of direct cultural expression on the one hand and reflection on cultural tradition on the other in the newspaper content correspond with the differing patterns of urbanisation in Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia). This process began earlier in Buryatia. Ulan Ude's Buryat population grew rapidly during the late Soviet period: 23 per cent of the Buryat population lived in urban areas in 1970, compared to 45 per cent in 1989 (Boronova, 2005: p. 131). A population of urbanised Buryat had thus begun to develop before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the mass migration of rural Sakha to Yakutsk began during the late Soviet period, it has been greatly intensified by post-Soviet republican government policy. Yakutsk's urban cultures are still under the influence of a large population of recent immigrants from

predominantly Sakha social and cultural settings, who are faced with the task of adapting their rural Sakha outlook to Yakutsk's relatively cosmopolitan environment – while the population of urbanised second-generation Sakha town-dwellers is smaller than the corresponding Buryat population.

Sakha (Yakutia)'s commercial newspapers reflect the co-existence of these recent rural Sakha incomers with a Russianised urban minority, since the combination of the consideration of Sakha tradition with displays of Sakha practice they offer would resonate with both groups – and would also be expected from a team of journalists made up of both urbanised Sakha, and recent rural immigrants. However, a potential culture clash between urban and rural Sakha is revealed in the contrast between the apparently unselfconscious manifestation of a Sakha worldview and the occasional mention of a complete lack of familiarity with contemporary Sakha practice. For example, one of *Yakutsk Vecherniy*'s Sakha journalists was unable to speak Sakha (*Yakutsk Vecherniy*, August 27, 2004: pp. 68–69). Both *Yakutsk Vecherniy* and *Yakutia* published articles designed to pacify a conflict between young urban and rural Sakha, displaying a unity of intention between private and government actors that implies the perception of a serious social problem (*Yakutia*, September 3, 2004: p. 26; *Yakutsk Vecherniy*, June 25, 2004: p. 65). This clash is likely to create a strong emotional response among both rural Sakha incomers and urbanised Sakha. Rural Sakha perceive that the urbanised members of their own ethnic group despise its culture and values; the antipathy rural Sakha display towards urban Sakha must aggravate a sense that their Russianised outlook has made the latter's ethnic identity meaningless.

Nevertheless, the diverse approaches to Sakha culture in Sakha

(Yakutia)'s newspapers indicate that the personal challenges arising from the urban-rural divide are stimulating a development of attitudes and perceptions designed to help rural and urban Sakha find a relevance for their Sakha identities in their daily experience. Newspapers have a significant role within this development, since they are able through repetition to popularise ideas, helping individuals to assimilate them into their personal world-views. These developing ideas interact with the various other concerns and habits that generate cultural development as a whole, although they are likely to influence the growth of urban Sakha cultures in particular. They will also develop in dialogue with the parallel changes occurring in rural attitudes, through both the contact rural incomers retain with their home regions via their networks of family and friends, and the interchanges of rural and urban attitudes that take place within individuals as they form their own ways of adapting to urban life.

The distinction between 'rural' and 'urban' culture is extremely difficult to define, however. It could lie in the different motivations behind specific attitude changes. The radical transformations in lifestyle and environment that accompany a move to Yakutsk generate a need to re-assess the meaning and value of Sakha identity and culture, while rural populations have to negotiate the changes in their personal relationships with urbanised friends and relatives, who have acquired new and sometimes unsettling beliefs and aspirations. The specifically Sakha culture the newspapers exhibit is in rapid development, stimulated by a combination of personal, economic and demographic factors.

In Buryatia, *Inform Polis*' relatively consistent discussion of traditional culture indicates the presence of a large Russianised Buryat population, which has had the time to develop a set of specific attitudes and practices within Ulan

Ude's mainstream culture. The sub-regional newspaper *Barguzinskaya Pravda* contained unselfconscious revelations of a specifically Buryat worldview, indicating that a dichotomy between rural and urban outlooks also exists. As with the Sakha, urban and rural attitudes are likely to be developing in tandem, since some urban Buryat will have retained contact with their relatives in the regions. The precise contentions expressed within *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s rare displays of Buryat attitudes were not found in any of *Inform Polis*' narratives, which shows the extent to which urbanised Buryat beliefs differ from rural, due to the greater assimilation of urban Buryats into the Russian Federation's mainstream culture.

However, *Inform Polis*' content revealed subtle differences between Russianised Buryat attitudes and the mainstream Russian outlook. For example, *Inform Polis*' articles on religion assumed their audiences had a distinctive willingness to believe in a direct effect spiritual entities can have on the material world, which was not evident in the material from the Moscow-based newspapers *Argumenti i Fakty* and *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*. This attitude resonates with the remarks *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s Buryat authors made about area spirits, although it differs slightly from the beliefs they displayed. Russified Buryat ideas therefore form a distinct, ethnic-specific cultural development – albeit strongly influenced by the need to solve Buryat identity crises, a parallel with the problems of the Sakha.

The similarity in the personal, social and economic motivations behind Buryat and Sakha urban cultural development suggests that urban Sakha attitudes could also form a distinct outlook similar to that of the urban Buryat, as the urban Sakha population produces new generations of Russianised Sakha

citizens. Urbanisation acts as an additional influence over the role Buryat and Sakha cultures play within their republican contexts, along with the sizes of their populations and the financial and political resources available to their nationalist movements. The following sections show how all these factors feed into a flow of changing ideas, aspirations and practices, which ultimately determines the political significance of each culture.

Section 7.2: The role of politics in Buryat and Sakha cultural development

The discourse analysis of both government and commercial newspapers showed the attitudes that are arising out of contemporary Buryat and Sakha cultural development, and the way they interact with their respective Republics' political contexts. It corroborates the indication provided by the ethnographic research that non-Russian ethnic identity is closely involved with political strategy – however it presents the interaction between personal perception and political strategy in detail, by juxtaposing political legitimising narratives against articles created to attract a paying audience (Balzer, Petro and Robertson, 2001; Balzer, 1993; 1995; 1999; Anderson, 2000; Grant, 1995; Humphrey, 1998). The discourse analysis revealed attitudes and discursive practices that explain the variation in Buryat and Sakha political influence, while also conveying the significance Buryat and Sakha culture can have for individuals. The analysis indicated that the policies intended to manipulate understandings of Buryat and Sakha identity are part of the intricate combination of personal, social and economic factors within Buryat and Sakha cultural development.

The factors influencing contemporary Buryat and Sakha identities

include the nature of these Republics' government practice. In both Republics the governments mask shortcomings in their administration with demonstrative strategies, which both influence and are in part determined by Buryat and Sakha attitudes and identities. At the same time Buryat and Sakha cultural attitudes are essentially independent from political strategy and beyond its power to control, like the cultural and social developments that were generated by Soviet policy and ideology. This is in part because politicians themselves are subject to the changes in attitude and perception brought about by cultural development. The Sakha case in particular shows how Soviet-era notions of progress, adapted into distinctively Sakha social practice, influence the strategies and aspirations of Sakha politicians.

All of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers, and especially the Sakha-language sub-regional newspaper *Erkeeyi*, showed that life in the Sakha agricultural regions is strongly affected by the presence of localised hierarchies, based on Soviet, or even pre-Soviet, family networks. Individual statuses within these hierarchies, in addition to those of the hierarchies themselves, are determined to a large extent by publicly recognised achievements – be they the acquisition of high-level positions in politics, business or academia, or success in public competitions such as sports tournaments. Both government and commercial newspapers contained articles or statements indicating that individual Sakha value themselves according to the statuses of their family and territorial networks, in addition to their own status within these groups. This creates a powerful imperative for individuals to do well in public arenas, in order to raise both their individual statuses and those of the groups they affiliate themselves with – which includes the overarching community of the Sakha people.

All of Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers showed that the Soviet historical materialist notion of national 'progress' described above has been incorporated into this worldview, as a preoccupation with the Sakha's status within the hierarchy of 'greater' or 'lesser' peoples. The newspaper discourse expressed this preoccupation either as a concern that the Sakha ethnic group is 'undeveloped', or as a tendency to claim the Sakha have an exceptionally rich and ancient cultural heritage. The newspapers also presented material about the Sakha cultural heritage in conjunction with spiritual, supernatural or universally valuable phenomena, ascribing a transcendent worth to Sakha culture.

As the newspaper discourse showed, the Republic's Sakha politicians generally belong to regional Sakha hierarchies. Their elite positions give them an exclusive access to their home communities' economic and social resources. However, they are also under pressure to promote their regions' statuses by increasing their level of progress. Their commitment towards improving their subject populations' standing is also expected to extend to that of the entire Sakha people, along with their Republic. Their motivation to develop their home regions, or the Republic as a whole, does not necessarily translate into a desire to govern them efficiently, or to improve standards of living for the citizenry. The newspaper content revealed the constant need for Sakha (Yakutia)'s leading politicians and businessmen to defend their positions within a dynamic and aggressive elite, which includes actors from the federal-level political sphere. Sakha (Yakutia)'s prevailing political atmosphere encourages prominent displays of government activity, rather than a sustained attempt to create an efficient state.

The popular desire for Sakha (Yakutia)'s 'development' influences

politicians to construct their legitimisation strategy accordingly, as *Yakutia* showed, consistently emphasising the republican government's efforts to improve Sakha (Yakutia)'s industrial, economic and social progress. The Sakha nationalist statements in *Yakutia* coincided with much more explicit articles in the Sakha-language government newspaper *Sakha Sire*, which presented Sakha (Yakutia) as a project to develop the Sakha people. The Sakha politicians who wrote them were thus emphasising their specific commitment to the development of the Sakha nation, possibly as part of a consistent self-promotion technique.

The constant presentation of the republican politicians' attempts to develop Sakha (Yakutia) enables the Sakha to associate their ethnic identity with the political sphere, whether or not they believe their politicians' assertions. The legitimisation techniques used by politicians encourage the Sakha to view their republican political establishment as an extension of their regional hierarchies, and their culture as developing in conjunction with their Republic. The republican government has succeeded in creating a legitimisation strategy that encourages loyalty towards the republican state from both the Sakha population and its politicians. The risk is that the Sakha awareness of their cultural 'progress' may lead to calls for a greater level of self-government, and even for Sakha (Yakutia) to exist as an exclusively Sakha state.

Sakha intellectual nationalist organisations continue to exist, although they do not have overt mass support. Instead, a persistent Sakha desire to live as a 'developed' nation within their own nation-state can be discerned in occasional demonstrations of a radical and exclusive commitment to Sakha interests; these are common enough to be recognisable as a distinct pattern of

behaviour. The capacity for young Sakha occasionally to attack Russianised Sakha is an example, as is the continuing public appearance of exaggerated claims about the Sakha people's cultural achievements – such as an assertion that the isolated Sakha have preserved the valuable Turkic roots of English culture in a purer form, and are currently helping the English to rediscover their Turkic heritage.[37]

The Sakha preoccupation with their ethnic culture and its development has clear implications for the federal government, given the huge sums of money that can be made from Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources. So too is the presence of several Sakha individuals among the political and economic elites, and the increasingly dominant proportion of Sakha in the Republic's population. The federal government, however, has not attempted to remove President Vyacheslav Shtyrov's administration, despite occasional resistance to the Kremlin's policies (Vladimir Putin recommended Shtyrov for a second presidential term in 2006). This suggests that their capacity to manage the relationships between the Sakha, their politicians, and the republican government itself is too valuable to lose, at least for the time being.

Buryatia's newspaper content suggests that a sense of pan-Buryat identity is increasing in step with the urban Buryat cultural development described above. The rural newspaper *Barguzinskaya Pravda*'s Buryat statements referred only once to the Buryat as a whole, instead focusing on regional or family communities. On the other hand, *Inform Polis*' articles on Buryat culture presupposed the existence of a cohesive Buryat ethnic group. *Inform Polis* rarely associated Buryat culture with the Republic's politics,

[37] www.sakhalife.ru: "*Yakutiya pomogayet Anglii vspomnit' tyuretskiye korni*"; May 29, 2007.

instead implying it to transcend Buryatia's contemporary context. Buryat culture appeared in *Inform Polis* to have a sacred essence: it enabled its adherents to encounter the primordial spiritual forces that exist within Buryatia's landscape, history, and Buddhist tradition. Its connection to an inherently beneficial spiritual power was such that an explicit commitment to a Buryat identity was implied to be analogous to a statement of religious faith. None of Buryatia's newspapers expressed a strong concern about the Buryat ethnic group's level of 'development', or its future progress and status: they focused instead on portraying an idealised past, while emphasising the spiritual riches that lie at the heart of every traditional culture and religion. The attractiveness and accessibility of the solution these idealised portraits offer to those who question the relevance of their Buryat identity give it the potential to form a central part of contemporary urban Buryat cultural development. The importance of these idealised representations of Buryat culture could increase, if the current urbanisation and Russification of the Buryat continues.

Inform Polis' emphasis on transcendent, beneficial forces resembled *Buryatia*'s constant evocation of a striving towards an abstracted, ultimately valuable spiritual power, manifested by cultural production, historical tradition and pre-Soviet ethnic culture. The evidence of the newspapers is that this narrative formed the basis of the republican government's legitimisation strategy. *Buryatia* displayed the republican government's keen desire to support those who yearn towards the supremely valuable, for example by sponsoring cultural, religious or academic ceremonial occasions. *Buryatia*'s abstracted and idealised notion of ethnic culture, promoted as part of this legitimisation display, is matched by *Inform Polis*' tendency to ascribe a quasi-religious significance to

Buryat ethnic culture. In so doing *Inform Polis* celebrates Buryat culture within a value system that echoes the government-sponsored espousal of traditional culture and religion. However, *Inform Polis*' supernatural forces were portrayed as spiritual beings with the capacity to affect the material world, unlike *Buryatia*'s universal but indistinct values – indicating that the cultural development *Inform Polis* expresses does not assimilate its constituent ideas directly from government discourse, although it may incorporate the attractive aspects of government narratives.

This dislocation between government and commercial newspaper discourse reflects the lack of engagement between Buryatia's citizens and its government. As all Buryatia's newspapers showed, the republican government has a very limited capacity to improve its citizens' welfare, and lacks the financial resources for the sustained display of state-building undertaken by Sakha (Yakutia)'s government. Both republican administrations offer their populations large public demonstrations in lieu of efficient government; however, while Sakha (Yakutia)'s natural resources enable its government to organise international sports tournaments, Buryatia's government has to be content with marking its state holidays with firework displays. The lack of genuine political initiatives, in addition to the frustration occasionally expressed by *Inform Polis*, *Pyatnitsa Plyus* and *Barguzinskaya Pravda*, suggest that Buryatia's citizens have good reason to adopt a dismissive attitude towards their government.

Current developments in Buryat culture do not encourage an aspiration towards political autonomy, unlike Sakha culture. While the population of Buryatia continues to be predominantly Slavic, no Buryat nationalist movement

would be able to make a viable claim for greater Buryat autonomy. The activities of the Buryat nationalists who remain in the political establishment are restricted to the Republic's cultural and educational institutions. Buryat culture is more likely to continue to be regarded as external to republican and federal politics, particularly as the transcendent, spiritual significance ascribed to Buryat culture gives it the capacity to generate strong identities that are independent of politics. These in turn can weaken the individual's sense of a federal or republican state identity.

The increasingly significant pan-Buryat identity could potentially form a basis for future mass Buryat nationalist movements. The current stirrings towards such movements generally take the form of communications between young people in Internet chat rooms, which are inaccessible to most of the Buryat population. However, the constant presentation of a quasi-religious Buryat culture in *Inform Polis*, Buryatia's most popular newspaper, shows that the possibility of another Buryat 'national revival' remains, in the form of personal attachments that could under the right circumstances be mobilised into a political force.

The Buryat and Sakha are likely to continue to value their ethnic identities and cultures for the immediate future. A pan-ethnic popular identification with the republican state institutions is unlikely to develop, at least while these republican administrations produce legitimisation displays that encourage personal perceptions of ethnic identity. The constant association in the public mind of the Russian Federation with the Russian people must hinder the development of popular Buryat and Sakha affiliations with the federal state, while the frequent negative portrayals of 'Muscovites' in both Buryatia's and

Sakha (Yakutia)'s commercial newspapers indicate a general suspicion towards the federal government. A marked improvement in quality of life could combine with increasing mobility and connection with the outside world to reduce the significance of Buryat and Sakha identity, encouraging individuals to focus on their prospects within or outside the Russian Federation as a whole. Conversely, a continuation of the poor quality of governance exhibited by Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers could increase popular feelings of frustration, absorbing local populations in the effort to cope with the personal and economic pressures created by their immediate environment. Both republican governments therefore increase the importance of ethnic identity, despite their interest in minimising its emotional power: their policies form part of Buryat and Sakha cultural development, rather than acting as an external control.

Section 7.3: Ethnic identity and politics in the Russian Federation

The different sets of attitudes within Buryat and Sakha culture show the variance in the ways Soviet ideology was assimilated by non-Russian cultures. This variance is likely to correspond with differing experiences of Sovietisation, conditioned partly by these Republics' specific economic, political and geographic contexts, and partly by the influence pre-Soviet Buryat and Sakha culture would have had on individual perceptions of the Soviet project. The differing notions of spirituality within these newspaper discourses suggest that Soviet ideology has been adapted into Buryat and Sakha cultural development, simultaneously reinforcing and re-shaping cultural tendencies from the pre-Soviet era. The newspapers corroborate the ethnographers' suggestion that

contemporary non-Russian cultures are formed from the interchange between government policy and traditional attitudes. This process of cultural development has enabled Soviet-era ideas about ethnicity to acquire a profound personal significance, despite their origins in a political project far removed from traditional Buryat and Sakha culture. It explains why Russianised Buryat and Sakha culture remains distinct from mainstream Russian culture.

One very significant feature of this distinctiveness is the way the newspapers in the sample depict the spiritual world. The Sakha concern about talent is connected in the newspaper discourse with the spiritual world in a way that recalls their shamanist cultural heritage. Sakha (Yakutia)'s newspapers placed an extremely high value on what they portray as innate talent – whether this belonged to individual people, or the Sakha ethnic group as a whole. All the newspapers contained lengthy celebrations of specific individuals, which lauded not only their personal gifts and achievements, but also their good nature and positive attitude towards life. These celebrations included representations of mysterious, supernatural phenomena: the individual concerned could in some cases have outstanding psychic abilities, or knowledge of religious tradition. In doing so, they displayed an understanding of the spiritual as continuous with the immediately perceptible human world, being manifested by human talent and achievement. The connection these newspaper articles made between their representation of spirituality and human ability suggests that the pre-Soviet Sakha capacity to regard human talent as endowed by benevolent spirits continues, if only as a tendency to place an extremely high value on human achievement and status.

These continuities between pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet Sakha

society reveal why the Sakha continue to treat the Soviet-influenced idea of national 'development' as an axiom, while attaching a limited importance to the Soviet ideal of a 'friendship of peoples' (*druzhba narodov*). The competitive streak that runs through Sakha culture predisposes the Sakha to assimilate the Soviet theory of cultural 'progress', since the competitive hierarchy of 'nations' it posits is likely to be familiar to the Sakha worldview, and therefore easily adaptable into everyday patterns of thought. The notion of a national hierarchy based on 'development' promotes the habit of viewing individuals and groups in terms of their position on a scale determined by public achievement, and thus reproduces the tendency to place a high value on innate talent. It encourages the Sakha to continue to associate the mysterious, transcending dimensions of life with human accomplishment, in addition to creating a strong desire to see the Sakha ethnic group itself as unusually gifted. The aspect of Soviet nationalities ideology that has the strongest resonance with pre-Soviet Sakha culture has become adapted into contemporary Sakha concerns and attitudes, in the process creating new formulations of pre-Soviet Sakha beliefs.

In Buryatia, *Inform Polis*' consistent representation of non-material entities, which are manifested directly rather than as natural phenomena, could equally exhibit the continuing influence of the eastern Buryat Buddhist and Shamanist tradition. The idea of a mysterious, transcendent and inherently good primordial force appears in all of *Inform Polis*' articles about Buryat culture. This preoccupation with idealised, abstracted spiritual entities, rather than the nuances of social relationships, perhaps marks the continuing relevance of the eastern Buryat people's pre-Soviet exposure to Mongolian Buddhism. It reveals a greater willingness to engage with notions about explicitly 'other-worldly'

forces, whose agency nevertheless has a vital importance for an individual's moral and physical well-being. This emphasis contrasts with the Sakha tendency to sublimate a similarly animist cultural influence into an overriding concern about status.

Inform Polis' articles reflect a tendency to regard the spiritual as sufficiently distinct from the material world to have generated the hierarchies and practices that accompany the world's religious and cultural traditions. The hierarchy of lamas in Mongolian Buddhism acts to distinguish the spiritual sphere from immediate human experience. It presupposes the need for an elaborate system of learning and practice in order to encounter the spiritual, which requires the existence of a large organisation and is therefore beyond the capacity of a single human being. Mongolian Buddhist practice would encourage a belief in an abstracted spiritual entity that transcends daily life, such as the idealised spiritual forces *Inform Polis* describes.

This interest in transcendent dimensions of reality could explain why a newspaper produced for contemporary urban Buryats attributes such importance to traditional culture. It may also explain why previous Buryat generations were so ready to engage with the Marxist-Leninist contention that communist cultural production should consist of the Soviet Union's different ethnic folk art forms translated into 'developed' Soviet genres. This aspect of Soviet ideology was promoted in connection with the *korenizatsiya* policy, which aimed to create non-Russian academic and cultural elites to facilitate such Soviet cultural production in the national Republics. Ethnic culture itself was implied to have a specific cultural value, although limited by its lack of development: according to Soviet-era historical materialism, national groups, who had developed their own

national polities, superseded ethnic groups.

A Buddhist-influenced preoccupation with otherworldly transcendence would encourage individual Buryats to place a high value on the Buryat cultural production created through *korenizatsiya* – even if they were thoroughly sympathetic to Soviet ideology and believed Buddhism itself to be redundant or harmful. The distinction Soviet nationalities theory makes between ethnic culture and nation-state politics distances ethnic culture from the more quotidian aspects of Soviet life, placing it outside the Soviet-era routines that were designed to integrate daily life into the developing Soviet state.

The apolitical quality Soviet theory ascribes to ethnic culture would encourage people habituated to the idea that reality has a mysterious, transcendent dimension to associate it with Sovietised ethnic cultural production – particularly since this cultural production was accomplished by a highly specialised hierarchy of Soviet-trained Buryat intellectuals. These intellectuals take the position relative to reality's transcendent dimension previously held by the Buddhist lamas: their increased knowledge and understanding gives them a greater access to the higher aspects of existence, allowing them to mediate on behalf of ordinary people. Melissa Chakars notes that the Buryat produced one of the Soviet Union's most active cultural elites, displaying an unusual enthusiasm for the opportunity to develop their ethnic cultural production (Chakars, 2008). However, this did not result in mass support for the Buryat intellectual nationalist movement. Indeed, a high regard for ethnic cultural production in general could well lessen an individual's sympathy for a political movement prioritising the needs of a specific ethnic group.

A Soviet-era tendency to impute inherent value to an abstracted 'ethnic

culture' could be behind the continuing Buryat willingness to idealise the Soviet notion of the 'friendship of peoples' (*druzhba narodov*), rather than developing a preoccupation with their place in the hierarchy of nations. The *korenizatsiya* policy and its ideology created the conditions for urbanised Buryats to continue to imagine an abstracted spiritual domain. Today, their capacity to associate themselves with a spiritualised notion of the Buryat ethnic group appears to be growing, rather than diminishing, with increasing urbanisation, as the idealised representations of Buryat culture in *Inform Polis* show.

The complicated interaction between pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet ideas in the two Republics' newspapers indicates a common pattern of cultural development, which is stimulated by disjunctions in the relationship between beliefs and their corresponding values, and the immediate context. The case of Buryat and Sakha urban cultural development shows how the impossibility of applying collectively held beliefs and values to a given context can generate new popular attitudes. These attitudes are formed out of adapting the available ideas into the beliefs, values, practices and aspirations that fit the circumstances more easily.

As the combination of old and new ideas in contemporary Buryat and Sakha culture shows, previously held beliefs have a strong effect over the adaptation of new ideas into common attitudes. They influence the way ideas and events are interpreted, thereby conditioning the assimilation of new concepts into contemporary culture. Both Buryat and Sakha cultural development is therefore characterised by the adaptation of fresh ideas into older worldviews as their respective contexts change, creating re-formed perspectives

that in turn influence further cultural development.

The political events in Russia over the past century have had an integral role in this process of cultural development, in that they have accelerated the radical social and economic change that motivates it. The Buryat and Sakha were exposed to a systematic attempt to reform their entire way of life and thought; this attempt was to become distorted beyond recognition as the twentieth century progressed. The demographic and economic shifts that began during the late Soviet period have intensified, as the influence of global market forces over the Russian Federation's economy has increased. Meanwhile, the monolithic Soviet mass media institutions have disintegrated into a varied collection of both government-sponsored and commercial media organs. The population of the former Soviet Union has again been confronted with a set of circumstances that renders many of its central beliefs, values and aspirations obsolete – thus stimulating the development of new popular attitudes, heavily influenced by ideas formulated during the Soviet era.

Political legitimisation strategies continue to influence this development by targeting personal perceptions of identity, as the Buryat and Sakha cases show, although they are simultaneously subject to its effects. The early Soviet intervention into its population's attitudes has made popular ethnic identity a compelling political concern.

The newspaper discourses in both Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) reveal a tendency to ascribe a transcending, universal significance to Buryat and Sakha culture. This allows individual Buryat and Sakha to incorporate an ultimate reason for living into their perception of their own ethnic identity. The Sakha can claim their supreme purpose is to help fulfil their people's destined role in

the history of humanity, establishing their status among the world's 'great' peoples. The inherent spiritual transcendence imputed to the Buryat cultural tradition enables the Buryat to view their quest for the universally good as central to their Buryat identity. These goals encompass a sufficiently broad spectrum of spiritual, moral and practical associations to allow individuals to formulate their habits, aspirations and self-perceptions around them in different ways. The newspapers are producing narratives that not only flatter their audiences' Buryat or Sakha identities, but also present them with a life purpose capable of generating an entire personhood, via an abstracted portrayal of Buryat or Sakha culture.

The newspaper data suggest that the association Altanhuu Hürelbataar and Marjorie Balzer show to exist between religious practice and ethnic identity has been extended into the way that ethnicity itself is understood (Altanhuu Hürelbataar, 2007; Balzer, 1999). Both ethnographers describe cases where a distinctive religious practice has provided a way for non-Russian peoples to attach meaning to their ethnicity; for example, Balzer contends that the Khanty of Western Siberia have maintained their sense of distinctiveness through their belief in reincarnation (Balzer, 1999: pp. 173–203). Tracing the notions of identity in newspaper discourse reveals how this association can generate new understandings of ethnicity, and its significance.

The comparison of government and commercial newspaper discourse shows that political legitimisation strategies work to reinforce an implied connection between Buryat and Sakha identity and an ultimate life purpose. *Yakutia* and *Sakha Sire* frequently demonstrate the Republican government's

efforts to 'develop' Sakha (Yakutia), re-iterating the theory of national progress as they do so, while publishing celebrations of the Sakha people's superlative national achievements. *Buryatia* attributes a spiritual and moral yearning to a variety of political acts, as it emphasises the spiritual treasury within ethnic cultural production. Non-Russian identity, far from interfering with a loyalty to republican state institutions, provides powerful actors with a means to engineer a popular relationship with an elite hierarchy that cannot offer its citizens effective governance. In the absence of genuinely stable and efficient state institutions the management by the elite of ideas associated with non-Russian identity has an important role, as the republican administrations demonstrate their commitment towards their population through a display of their respect for and engagement with their populations' ethnic identities and cultures. These displays are directed towards Slavic as well as non-Russian populations, as the careful balancing of non-Russian and Russian folk dancing festivals in *Buryatia* and *Yakutia* shows.

The capacity to ascribe a profound, quasi-spiritual relevance to one's ethnic identity could exist in various forms throughout the Russian Federation. **Indeed, Nick Megoran notes assertions in Uzbekistan's newspapers and popular music that an 'essence' of Uzbekness accords the modern state a great "spiritual, cultural and political legacy" (Megoran, 2004: p. 743), making it "'as holy as a house of prayer'" (Megoran, 2005: p. 565).** As Chapter Four described, the representation of Russia and its place in the world in the federal-level newspapers *Argumenti i Fakti* and *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* was reminiscent of Soviet ideology from the Cold War era. It assumed that the world exists as a collective of self-sufficient national-ethnic groups – the *natsii*,

who have developed out of *narodnosti* – which hope to destroy Russia's power. The way these articles represented people was determined by these article subjects' alleged orientation towards the Russian Federation: those who supported the Russian Federation's interests were positive, sympathetic characters, whereas the individuals or *natzii* who were apparently 'against' Russia were unpleasant. The Russian Federation itself was generally associated with ethnic Russians, thus confusing the notion of the Russian state with that of the Russian people. The federal-level newspaper *Argumenti i Fakti* made a particularly clear link between the Russian people, the Russian state and the Orthodox Church, implying that those seeking to defend Russia from its enemies also had a religious motivation: the Russian Orthodox heritage appeared to confer a universally significant spiritual dimension on to Russian culture and identity (Agadjanian, 2001).

Argumenti i Fakti and *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* are among the Russian Federation's most popular commercial newspapers, and so must have been reproducing a worldview that is acceptable to a reasonable proportion of the Russian Federation's population. Their articles always corroborated the Putin administration's official line, revealing an additional political influence. Their discourse indicates the continuing tendency for the federal government to incorporate perceptions of ethnic identity into its public communication strategies, as noted by Bo Petersson and Ivan Zassourskiy (Zassourskiy, 2001; Petersson, 2001). In doing so, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and *Argumenti i Fakti* could have been aiding a federal self-legitimisation strategy, based on an assumption that the Russian population is willing to invest their national and ethnic identity with an all-encompassing, quasi-religious significance. Like the

newspapers from Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia), they present their audiences with the opportunity to adapt their senses of self-purpose into a combined state and ethnic identity.

The paradox is that the federal government's use of Russian ethnic identity as a means to negotiate its relationship with its population appears to be contrary to its own interests, given the problems a heightened popular awareness of ethnic identity can cause. The Buryat and Sakha cases indicate that non-Russian cultures and identities can inhibit an affiliation with a federal state that emphasises its attachment to the Russian people. Federal policy makers are aware of this problem, as is shown by their willingness to privilege non-Russian interests over their own if circumstances require.

Those who create these narratives could also be using representations of ethnic identity to manage a difficult relationship with the general population, again as Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia). As we saw earlier, federal government policy does not always work to benefit either the regional administrations, or the general population. Contemporary Buryat and Sakha identities therefore could be part of a cultural development in the Russian Federation as a whole, which is strongly influenced by the personal and practical problems caused by a disjuncture between the republican administrations' apparent purpose – governing their republics' territories – and their actual achievement. As Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov notes in his account of the relationships developing between Soviet government officials and Evenki reindeer-herders, "failures and fragmentation have their own normalizing, and indeed, culturally constructive effects." (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2003: p. 7.)

One is reminded of the complex relationship (discussed in Chapter One)

between Soviet ideology and the reality of Soviet life, and the cultural development it generated. The cultural development this study has revealed suggests that the similarities between Soviet and contemporary political practice arise from the amalgamation of politics into an effort to solve a myriad of contradictions, affecting ordinary citizens, government workers, and the political and business elites. A major continuity between the Russian Federation and the Soviet Union therefore could be the influence the faults of their governing institutions exert on the nature of their statehood.

The effect indicated by this research is a tendency for citizens to value ethnic identity more highly than an affiliation with state institutions. As new versions of the Soviet notion of 'ethnicity' are developed into ideas, attitudes and aspirations that affect the government, and its population, so the changing perceptions of Russian and non-Russian ethnic identity far from threatening the state become integrated into its development. However, the nature of the state itself is not of a kind to generate either independent state institutions, or a widespread civic identity.

Afterword

The newspapers studied in this thesis provide a snapshot of a process of rapid cultural and political development which continues to carry the Russian Federation, Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) into their respective futures. Much has changed since 2004 in both the Republics and the entire Federation. Buryatia has a new President, who as an outsider will have to make a concerted effort to assert his authority over the republican political establishment. Sakha (Yakutia)'s government has lost control of ALROSA, and with it the capacity to make profitable deals with multinational corporations: De Beers' involvement with Sakha (Yakutia)'s diamond industry has been steadily decreasing, as it hands the lucrative business of selling the Republic's diamonds over to the consortium of Moscow-based politicians and businessmen who now own ALROSA. The Russian Federation has turned from a mysterious but essentially co-operative member of the international community to a powerful and threatening force.

What remains unchanged, however, is the notion of a quasi-sacred ethnic identity. This forms a consistent part of the logic underlying recent developments, while remaining the basis of politically expedient versions of events. The Russian Federation's central government, according to its own account, has been forced to defend its people against successive external aggressors, from British spies to an unstable Georgian President in cahoots with a perfidious West. Whatever the real nature of the threats facing Russia may be, the measures the federal government has taken have violated conventional international negotiations to an extent that has caused serious alarm, earning the

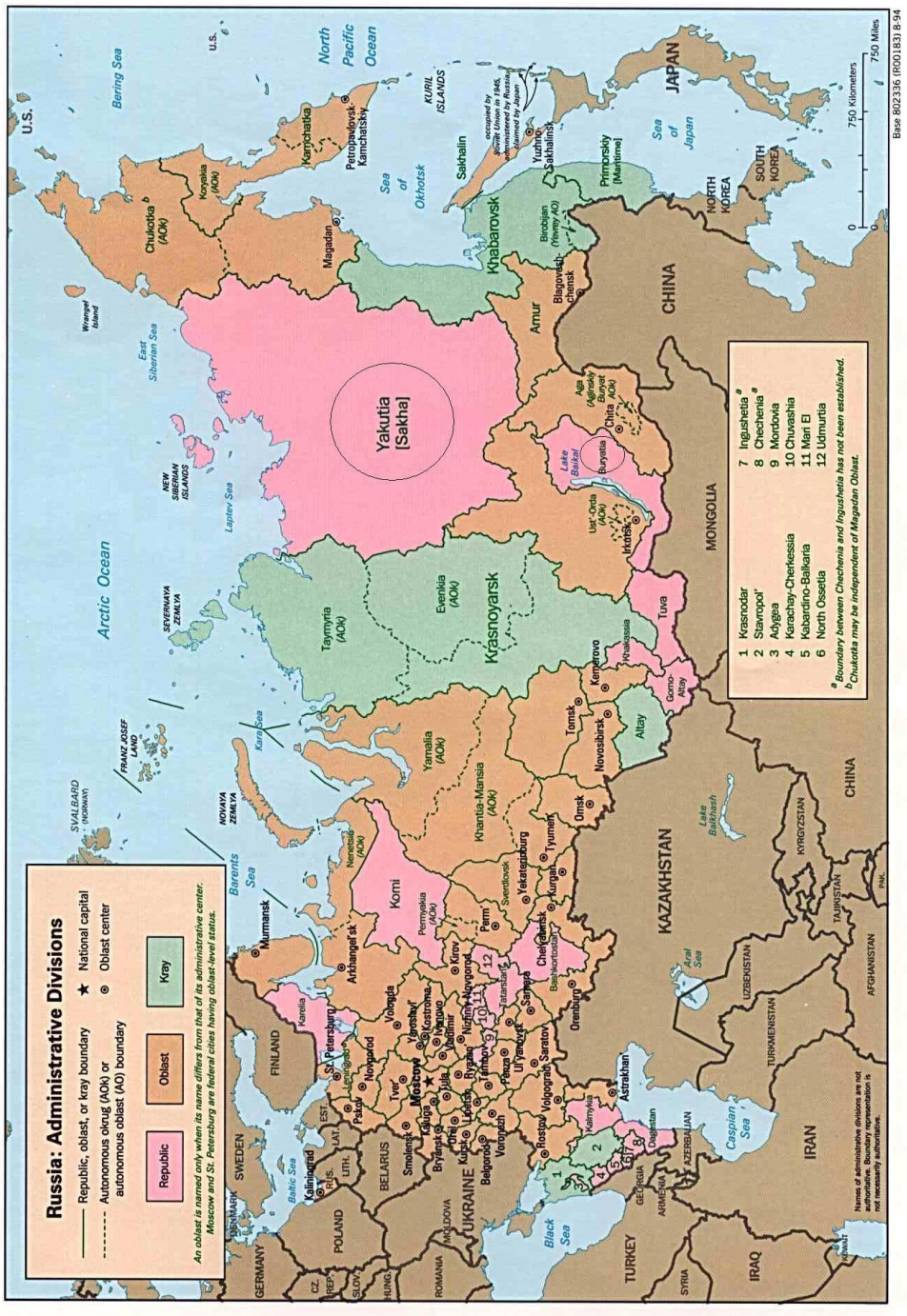
Russian Federation a new unpopularity. The aggressive stance of Russia's leaders makes sense however, when viewed as acting out the stories Russia's population are told via its mass media. The narrative about Russia's 'encirclement' is predicated on the assumption that ethnic identity is as important to the nations of the encircling world as they are to the nations of the Russian Federation.

The regional administrations that deal with Buryat and Sakha populations also continue to display their attachment to Buryat and Sakha ethnic culture. Buryatia's new President upbraided Ulan Ude's architects at the end of August 2008 for failing to add a "national colour" to their buildings; the Olympic flame of the 2008 *Dety Azii* tournament was blessed at a traditional Sakha *Algys* ceremony in Yakutsk (*Inform Polis*, August 28, 2008). Ethnic culture retains its place in government legitimisation techniques at all levels of the Russian federal state.

Meanwhile, the heated exchanges in the chat-rooms of Buryatia and Sakha (Yakutia) continue, as participants complain variously of Russian or Sakha chauvinism, demand to know why the President of Buryatia is Russian, or call for Americans and "those who call us Yakuts and Nazis" to be "whacked in the mug" (*dat' po mordam*).[38] Ethnic identity will remain a central factor in the Russian Federation's social and political life, and therefore a key to understanding the motivations of its political leaders.

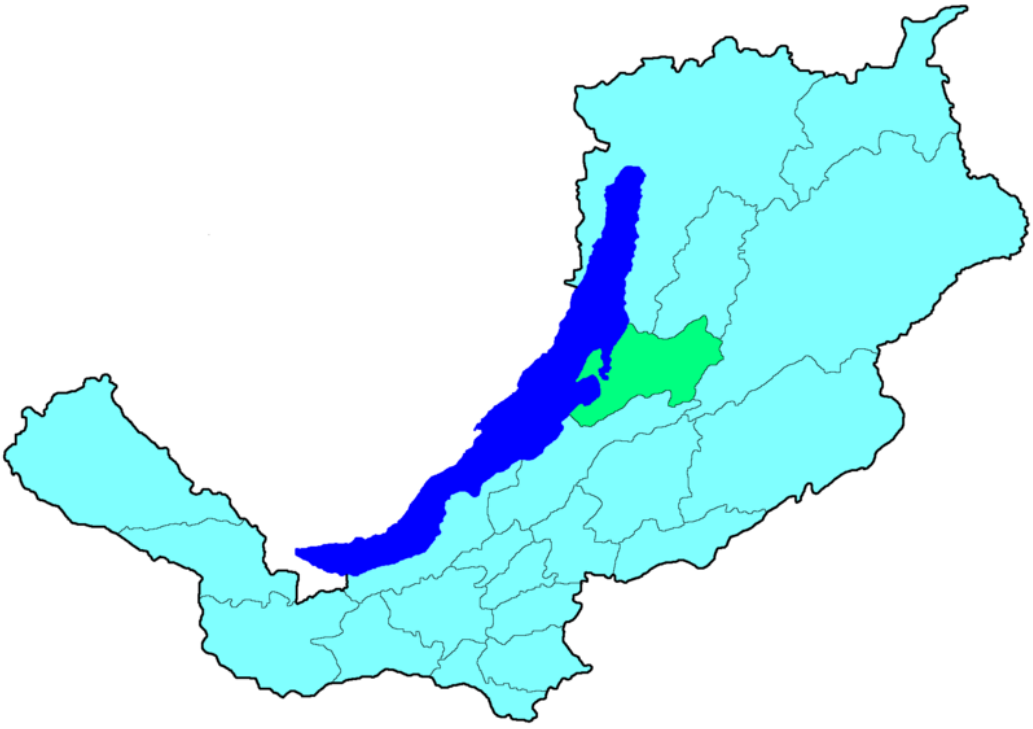
[38] www.ykt.ru/cgi-bin/forum.isa?f=6&a=rx&id=7407582; August 31, 2008.

Appendix One: Map of the Russian Federation in 1994



(Map taken from the University of Texas website, www.lib.utexas.edu/maps.)

Map of the Republic of Buryatia



Map of Sakha (Yakutia)

Appendix Two: List of codes used to analyse *Inform Polis*

academic work
accident
agriculture
alcohol crisis
Baikal
Beslan (*soboleznovaniye*)
Buryat cultural practice
celebration
celebration of person
child vospitanie
commercial puff
communist past
concerned reader
crime crisis
demand on citizens
demand on politician
diary report
economic crisis
Edinaya Rossiya
environment (threat)
federal level
foreigners
gossip
grazhdanskiye activity
health (problem)
history or tradition
human interest
information
kitchen gardening
kul'turnoe tvorchestvo
law enforcement (agency)
military
morals
narodnaya kultura
nauchniye seminary
negative for elites
new initiative
new legislation
non-political *aktsiya*
obraschenie
obsuzhdenie
paradigm
patriotism
political actors, activities
political *aktsiya*
political gathering
Potapov
potential crisis

privatisation
region/federation relationship
religious belief
republican political scandal
Russian cultural practice
social welfare
SuperBuryatEthnicId
SuperBuryatEthnicNationalism
SuperEthnicity
SuperRepublicanId
superzakon
terrorist crisis
torzhestvennoye sobytyye
trade
unusual
useful information
war veterans
worker's holiday
youth problems

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Moskovskiy Komsomolets (Ulan Ude), June 1–30, August 25–September 22, 2004.

Nashe Vremya (Yakutsk), June 1–30, August 25–September 22, 2004.

Pyatnitsa Plyus (Ulan Ude), June 1–30, August 25–September 22, 2004.

Sakha Sire (Yakutsk), June 1–30, August 25–September 22, 2004.

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